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CHRISTMAS IN STORYLAND

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PREFATORY NOTE

This anthology grew out of a real need. It has been a happy undertaking to assemble in one volume so rich and varied a collection of juvenile Christmas stories for use in the home, the school, and the library.

The editors of this volume hope that boys and girls will count the hours golden spent in reading "Christmas in Storyland."

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NOTE OF APPRECIATION

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CHRISTMAS IN STORYLAND

THE MAGIC CHRISTMAS GIFT [1]

Frances Margaret Fox

It was late autumn in the north woods, and Beatrice and Josephine were thinking about Christmas. They liked to think about Christmas: they liked to talk about it and to sing Christmas songs and to play Christmas games. Those two little girls had been known to play the game of Santa Claus filling Christmas stockings on the Fourth of July; and it was such fun they did not care who laughed.

Beatrice was seven years old and Josephine was nine that particular autumn day when they climbed to the top of the front gate posts to talk it over. There was no gate in front of their log cabin, only an opening where a gate would some day swing on hinges and fasten with a click. The gate posts were made of big, round logs of cedar, and were almost two feet taller than the top of the fence. There was a path leading from the gateway to the front door of the log cabin, and behind the cabin, and surrounding it on three sides, were the evergreen woods. In front of the cabin was a wide clearing belonging to the railway.

[1] This story was first printed in "Youth's Companion," December 21, 1916. Reprinted by special permission of the author and "Youth's Companion."

From early spring until late in the autumn the little girls were in the habit of climbing on the gate posts to watch the trains go by.

"I suppose if we had lots of money," said Beatrice from the top of her gate post, "I suppose we could go to Marquette and buy Christmas presents for the whole family!"

"But most of all for mother!" added Josephine, happily kicking her feet.

"What should we get mother if we had money and could go traveling?" Beatrice inquired.

"Well," answered Josephine, "if we ever have a ride on the cars, and if we ever go to Marquette with father and our pockets full of money, we'd buy,—we'd buy,—I don't know what and you don't know what!"

At that, the two little girls laughed and laughed until they almost fell off the gate posts; they liked to sit on the gate posts and laugh. For a while they talked about the Christmas presents they should like to make.

"But there should be something special for our mother," insisted Josephine.

"Oh," answered Beatrice, as she happily kicked her feet against her gate post, "I guess we'll have to give mother the same old promise we give her every Christmas, that she will have all the year two little girls, oh, such good little girls, to help take care of babies and tidy up the cabin, tra la-la, tra la-la-la!"

After that, until the afternoon train whistled, the

merry little girls kept choosing gifts for all the family, but most of all for mother. But the minute the train whistled, Beatrice suggested a new game.

"When the train starts puff-puff from the station just round the curve over there," said she, "and the wheels begin to turn round slowly, and the cars come slowly, rumble-rumble, you turn square round facing the train this way, just like me, and you sing with me this song I am just thinking up, and we'll try Christmas magic, like this:

"White magic,
Christmas magic,
Send our mother a Christmas gift!

"Gold magic,
Christmas magic,
Send our mother a Christmas gift!"

By the time the passenger train was opposite the little log cabin, the laughing children were gazing straight toward it, singing over and over to the rumble of the wheels:

"White magic,
Christmas magic,
Send our mother a Christmas gift!

"Gold magic,
Christmas magic,
Send our mother a Christmas gift!"

Of course those two little girls away off in the upper peninsula of Michigan, miles and miles from

any town, did not expect a magic Christmas gift for their mother; they simply had a good time, and forgot all about their game as soon as it was over and they had climbed down from their gate posts to go to the pasture after the cows.

But the day before Christmas, when the little cabin was bursting with Christmas joy and secrets, the postmaster from the settlement called to see Beatrice and Josephine. . . . He said he wished to speak with them alone. There was only one room in the cabin, one big, clean, cheerful room, and so the little girls climbed into the postmaster's sleigh and drove with him beyond sight of the house. Then he said "Whoa!" to his horses, and without another word he untied a big, flat parcel that looked like a picture in a frame; and it was a picture in a frame —a big picture of two merry-looking little girls, each seated on a gate post in front of a log-cabin home that had evergreen woods behind it and a clearing in front.

It was a long time before either child could speak; then Josephine whispered, "How did it happen?"

"A lady on a passing train who is a stranger to us all," the postmaster answered, "took a snapshot of you two, because you looked so happy. Then she had the picture enlarged and framed and sent it to me to give to you, so that you might give it to your mother for Christmas. She said she was sure I would know who you were by the picture; so, as I thought you would like a big Christmas surprise for your

mother, I asked to see you alone. Now we'll [illegible]'s just back to the house."

At last Beatrice found her voice; but "Did you ever!" was all she said, and "Did you ever!" was all Josephine said, until they remembered to thank the postmaster for his kindness.

On Christmas Eve the little girls could keep their secret no longer, and solemnly presented their mother with the magic gift.

Mother cried. Tears of joy rolled down her face when she saw it.

"I never before had a picture of any of you children," said she, "and I never expected to, because we live so far from a photographer. And this is so beautiful! Such happy faces! Oh, it seems too good to be true! It would not have happened if you were not such good little girls, always thinking of your mother!"

The next day two joyous little girls danced about the cabin, singing:

"White magic,
Christmas magic,
Brought our mother a Christmas gift!

"Gold magic,
Christmas magic,
Brought our mother a Christmas gift!"

And the two little faces in the picture smiled down upon the happy family cheerfully, then and ever after.

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THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS [1]

Edith Houghton Hooker

EVERYBODY'S hands were quite full of little pin-pricks from the holly leaves. Alan and David and little Alice had all been helping with the Christmas greens, and at last the wreaths were securely fastened on tiny tacks in the windows, and sprays of holly peeped festively out from behind each picture. There was a large red paper bell hanging from the chandelier in the hall for Santa Claus to ring when he came in, and beside it a sprig of mistletoe, so there would be no embarrassment about kissing him in case he should be caught.

It was Christmas eve, and we all gathered around the fire to rest after our labors and to speculate about the prospects for the morrow. "Suppose he doesn't come," surmised David, "or suppose he would bring us only switches!" The thought was terrifying.

"It all depends on what you deserve," I answered. "Santa Claus has a way, you know, of finding out just what each child really ought to get."

"Well," said Alan, the skeptic, "there are some

[1] Reprinted by permission of the author and "St. Nicholas Magazine."

who say there isn't any Santa Claus—that he's just a story made up by older people to amuse the children. I never knew of any one who'd seen him."

Alice gasped. "You will get only switches, Alan, if you say such things," she warned him.

"There are people who deny everything that's good and true," I took the conversation over, "but their lack of faith hurts no one as much as themselves. Would you like to hear about the old man who denied there was a Santa Claus and to learn what happened to him?"

"Please, please!" they all cried, and I began the story:

Once upon a time there was an old man whose name was Mr. Grouch, and he had lived so many years that he could hardly count them. He was little, and thin, and bent over, and wrinkled, and he had a scraggly little beard and cross, snapping eyes. He used to carry a big stick that he would shake at the boys when they laughed at him, and he never had a smile for anybody. He lived all alone with one crabbed old man-servant in a vast house, and no one even dared to ring the doorbell.

One Christmas eve I was coming down the street taking gifts around to some friends, and my mind was full of Christmas. There was a new fall of snow on the ground and the sleighbells were jingling. Even the busy shopkeepers seemed to be in the Christmas spirit. Banks of fir-trees stood on the corners, and every now and then I passed some one

proudly carrying home a tree over his shoulder. All of a sudden, whom should I see coming toward me but old Mr. Grouch, looking crosser than ever. He was shaking his stick at the Christmas trees and scowling at the fat turkeys, and for a moment I was half afraid to speak to him. Still it seemed too bad not to give the old man the season's greetings, so I called out as cheerily as I could— "A Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Grouch!"

He turned on me, coming quite close and shaking his big stick in my face, so that he frightened me. "A Merry Nonsense!" he snarled, biting the words off short. "You should go home and attend to your business, not go running around wasting your own time and other people's. This Merry Christmasing is all nonsense, I tell you, fit only for children and simpletons. There's no such person as Santa Claus! It's all a myth concocted by idle folk to fool the children."

I stood quite still, rooted to the spot, in terror lest Santa Claus should see me in such bad company.

"You don't know what you're saying, Mr. Grouch!" I finally brought out. "It's wicked to deny the spirit of Christmas."

"Wicked or not wicked," he retorted, "I say it again— A Merry Nonsense to you and all your kind!"

He looked so fierce that I hastened on my way without another word, and as I turned the corner, I still heard him muttering— "A Merry Nonsense! A Merry Nonsense!"

On he went homeward to his great dreary house, and there he found a frugal supper laid out by the old man-servant. He ate without appetite and then went upstairs. Then, after stuffing cotton in his ears and closing both the windows and the shutters to keep out the music of the bells and Christmas crackers, he climbed into his large four-poster bed, and pulling his nightcap down over his head, he went fast asleep.

How long he slept, he never knew, but suddenly he awoke hearing a strange sound. "*Plump!*" It was over near the fireplace, and there was a great rush of falling soot and plaster.

Mr. Grouch sat up quickly, scratched a match, and lighted his bedside candle. He lifted it high and scanned the room, peering out over the bed-clothes like a strange gnome in his pointed nightcap. He stared at the fireplace, and there—what do you think he saw? He could scarcely believe his eyes—and yet, sure enough, it was Santa Claus, dressed all in ermine and scarlet velvet, red cheeks glowing from the cold, his white beard glistening with snowflakes. There he stood chuckling softly and rubbing his hands together, the jolliest possible twinkle in his kind blue eyes.

"A Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Grouch," he said in a deep hearty voice.

Mr. Grouch trembled so that the candle wax dripped on his hand. "A Merry Christmas, Sir," he said, his voice sounding queer and squeaky.

"Now, Mr. Grouch," said Santa Claus, smiling

broadly, "that doesn't sound natural from you. Why don't you say 'A Merry Nonsense'? You don't believe in Santa Claus, and I know it, and I've come here this evening to give you back your faith—as a Christmas present. Put that candle down; get out of bed and into your clothes while I count three. My reindeer will be tired waiting."

Then you should have seen Mr. Grouch scramble. He popped his thin legs into his trousers and laced up his boots with shaking fingers; then he pulled on his greatcoat and wound his long knitted muffler round his neck just as Santa Claus said three!

"You've forgotten your hat," Santa Claus reminded him, chuckling. And sure enough, there he stood, the funniest figure you can imagine, still with his pointed nightcap on his head. He tore off his cap and placed his old beaver in its stead just as Santa Claus gave him a great boost that sent him flying up the chimney. Santa followed close after, and Mr. Grouch could hear him puffing and panting, and digging his boots into the side of the chimney as he came up behind him.

On top of the house it was all singularly quiet and peaceful. There was snow everywhere, on all the roofs as far as the eye could reach, and above was the limitless heaven with the calm stars shining out.

Santa Claus stretched his arm toward the East. "It was there," he said, "before I was born, that the wise men saw the Star of Bethlehem." His voice was so full and deep that the old man trem-

bled. He looked out over the great city and saw in a thousand homes the candles burning for Christmas. A group of singers, strolling by in the street, stopped and began to sing a Christmas carol. Suddenly the bells rang out from churches far and near. It was midnight, they were pealing the glad tidings.

"We must be off," said Santa Claus; "we are already late; we must be going."

Mr. Grouch noticed now for the first time a wonderful little sleigh drawn by eight reindeer harnessed in pairs together. In it lay Santa Claus's great pack, bursting with toys, and candy, and all sorts of joy for the children. One or two switches which Mr. Grouch saw sticking out on the top gave him a sense of uneasiness. "Get in, my man, get in!" commanded Santa Claus, and they leaped into the sleigh. The reindeer pawed the snow and snorted; then Santa Claus gave them the word and away they went. Over the housetops and over the trees, on—on—like a wind through the heavens. The old man clutched his hat down close on his head and shook with fear as he saw the great city glide by beneath them. Past the great houses they went and never drew rein. "They're rich there," said Santa Claus; "they have more than they need. We won't stop; they're untrue to the Spirit of Christmas."

After a time they came to a part of the town where the houses were all small and wretched-looking. "These are my boys and girls," said Santa, as he drew up on the roof of a particularly sorry-looking little dwelling. The reindeer shook their

great horns and their bells jingled. The old man looked doubtfully at Santa Claus and then at the little chimney.

"Can we get down?" he asked fearfully.

"It's the size of their hearts, not the size of their chimneys, that makes the difference," answered Santa Claus. "I'll go first and you follow."

He stepped in the chimney and down he went, and then Mr. Grouch stepped in and down he went, also. The fire was out, and they found themselves in a tiny little room all cold and wintry. Two little stockings were hanging by the hearth, long and lank and empty, and in a bed near by, two little children were sleeping. They were smiling happily as they slept, dreaming of Christmas morning. Before the empty fireplace a woman was sitting, dressed all in black. She was slight and small, and around her thin shoulders she had drawn a shawl to protect herself from the cold. Here there was no holly, no wreaths in the windows, nothing at all to suggest Christmas except the unfilled stockings. The little mother had her eyes fixed on the dead ashes, and her thoughts could not have been happy for tears were rolling down her cheeks. "Oh, the poor children!" she whispered to herself, with something very like a sob, "what will they do in the morning?" She hid her face in her hands and began to weep bitterly; and it was just at this juncture that Santa Claus and Mr. Grouch came down the chimney.

"Her husband died two months ago," whispered Santa Claus to Mr. Grouch, "and she has nothing

in the house for Christmas,—no toys, no Christmas turkey, no nuts and raisins, nothing at all to fill those hungry stockings." A large tear rolled down his cheek. Mr. Grouch sniffed and looked uneasily at the sleeping children.

"Now," said Santa Claus, "watch and see what happens."

While the little widow sobbed on, he took one thing after another out of his wonderful pack—nuts, raisins, candy canes, a beautiful great doll with yellow curls and blue eyes that went to sleep, a little railway-train, a top, a small tea-set, a doll's chair, and finally, several pieces of nice warm clothing. Then he proceeded to fill the stockings with remarkable speed. When they were finished, the doll was peeping out of one, and the little engine out of the other. Mr. Grouch thought it was all over; but no, Santa Claus reached far down into his pack once more and brought out a beautiful Christmas basket. The fat legs of a turkey were standing out amid cranberries, and sweet potatoes, and oranges, and apples, and every other sort of good thing you can imagine.

Santa Claus placed the basket under the stockings, and then poked Mr. Grouch in the ribs so hard that it made him jump. "Now," said he, "watch; for she'll be looking up."

And sure enough, in a moment the little widow sighed and raised her eyes. Then you should have been there to see her. Her poor little face grew quite pink with joy, she gasped, and her breath came fast

with bewilderment. She rubbed her eyes with her thin hands; she couldn't believe it was not a dream. Then she gave a little cry, just between a sob and a laugh, and fell on her knees before the basket.

She poked the fat turkey and felt deftly between all the other things until she knew exactly what was in the basket. "We'll have a beautiful Christmas dinner, after all," she said, "even a turkey!" She didn't take a thing out of the stockings—just peeped in and felt softly down the long knobby legs. "I'll leave them for the children just as he packed them, the dear saint!" she murmured to herself. She went over to the children and kissed each one softly; they smiled and wriggled cosily in their sleep. Then she looked over again at the wonderful hearthside—it seemed to Mr. Grouch that she looked straight at him, though of course she couldn't see him as both he and Santa Claus had on caps of darkness. Her face was shining with a wonderful light of love and joy. Her eyes beamed like two stars, and the room seemed to be filled with a kind of glory. "It's the blessed spirit of Christmas," she whispered brokenly, "come to cheer my fatherless little ones and me." Then she knelt down by her little bed, and it was plain that she was praying.

Santa Claus nodded triumphantly at Mr. Grouch, shaking off another big tear, and Mr. Grouch returned the look tremulously. He drew a large red handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped both eyes before speaking.

"Couldn't we take off our caps of darkness," he

finally whispered, "and wish her a Merry Christmas?"

"A Merry Nonsense!" said Santa Claus, laughing until his fat sides shook; "no—we're not allowed to be seen. *'Sh-h!* it's time to go up the chimney."

Up they went into the dark night where the reindeer were waiting for them. Into the sleigh they jumped and off they started, and, as the wind whistled by them, Mr. Grouch said: "Santa Claus, I feel I owe you an apology. When I saw her face—"

Santa Claus interrupted him: "If you're ready to admit you were wrong, go out to-morrow and wish every one a Merry Christmas."

Far, far away they went, out over the rolling sea till they came to a ship which had had to sail out from port just three days before Christmas. Down into the forecastle they went, where the sailors were sadly thinking of their homes, and spread cheer around until each man wished the other a Merry Christmas.

All the long night they sped over the great world leaving joy behind them. They visited the children's hospitals, where little boys and girls were lying awake, weeping for their mothers, and they quieted them and touched them with joy, and they slept, forgetful of their pain and sorrow. They visited sinful men in prison and softened their hearts, and they stopped at the homes of the rich and bade them remember their poorer brothers.

It was a night to dream of, such as no one else but Santa Claus can ever know again, but at last

the pink glow of morning showed in the eastern sky.

"It's time to be getting home," said Santa Claus. "We can be seen if we're out when the day is dawning."

In a moment they had landed safely on Mr. Grouch's roof.

"Good-by," said Santa Claus, as he politely helped his passenger to alight and to shake off the snow and start down the chimney, "and remember, you are never to say you don't believe in Santa Claus again!"

"Never in all this world!" said Mr. Grouch, in heartfelt tones. "Long live the spirit of Christmas!" He took off his hat and bowed in an old-fashioned, ceremonious manner just before the reindeer leaped into the air and started in the direction of the North Pole.

Mr. Grouch must have slid down the chimney and gone to bed after that, but in the morning he had forgotten all about that part of the adventure.

When the sun was high, the old man-servant knocked at the door and reminded him that breakfast was waiting. Mr. Grouch woke with a start. "A Merry Christmas to you, Andrew," he shouted.

The old servant ran almost all the way downstairs with never a word. He thought his master must be mad, for he had never heard him give that greeting before in all his thirty years of service.

On Christmas morning I went out to take some

toys, to the crippled children's hospital, and there, coming down the street, whom should I see but old Mr. Grouch, a gayly decorated little Christmas tree over his shoulder, the pockets of his greatcoat bulging with toys and candy, and behind him, trooping merrily along, an endless chain of boys and girls, each with a toy and a bag of candy.

I stood stock-still with surprise and waited for the procession to come up.

"A Merry Christmas to you!" shouted Mr. Grouch, his face glowing from the crisp air, and all the children called out too, "A Merry Christmas!"

"We're going to take this tree to some fatherless children," he said: "would you like to come along with us?"

When I found my voice, I explained my errand and, quick as a wink, Mr. Grouch said they would stop at the hospital too, on the way to the other children. So on we went, all together, and everybody smiled and beamed and echoed our joy as soon as they saw us.

It must have been merely my imagination, but Mr. Grouch's voice sounded to me just like Santa Claus's as he wished everybody "Merry Christmas!"

He spent the whole day going round from one poor family to another, taking them toys and good cheer and leaving joy everywhere behind him.

Now the most curious part of the story is yet to come, for, would you believe it, Mr. Grouch has grown quite fat and jolly as time has gone by, until

now, if you saw him, except for his black coat you would think he was Santa Claus. He has round red cheeks and a shining white beard, and his eyes are no longer cross and snapping; they beam upon every one the whole year round as if they were always saying, "I wish you a Merry Christmas!"

All of which goes to prove that Santa Claus is just as real as we think him, for each one of us can show by our own deeds and words the reality of the Spirit of Christmas.

I stopped.

"Is that all?" asked Alice.

"Yes," I answered, "the story is finished."

"And now do you believe in Santa Claus?" said David, looking hard at Alan.

"Yes," answered the boy, drawing a long breath. "Let's go up to the play-room and get some of our toys together to take to the hospital children to-morrow. We'll do it for the sake of the Spirit of Christmas."

A MONTANA CHRISTMAS[1]

John Clair Minot

David and Florence Payson live with their parents on a ranch in Montana. The nearest neighbor is a mile away and the nearest town nearly twenty miles; but that does not mean that they are so much out of the world as city children may imagine.

Most city children—and most country children, too, for that matter—count themselves fortunate to have one Christmas a year; but last year David and Florence Payson had two Christmases, and, moreover, they are planning a double Christmas again this year. The double Christmas came about in a very simple way, and it gave them by far the happiest holiday season that they had ever known.

The first of their two Christmases—and perhaps some of us would call it their real Christmas—came on Christmas Eve. There was a tree before the fireplace in the cheery living room, and it was loaded with good things that Mr. Payson had brought from town a few days before. Flashing tinsel and rippling streamers; bright flags and sprigs of crimson

[1] This story was first printed in "Youth's Companion," December 12, 1918. Reprinted by permission of the author and "Youth's Companion."

holly; golden fruit and candy of all kinds and colors; toys, toys, toys; books and pictures; things to wear and things to eat; and then more toys—all these made the tree very beautiful and wonderful to David and Florence when at last the living-room doors were opened and they were free to rush in. What a happy Christmas Eve they had then! In all the wide land there were perhaps no children who had a merrier time round their tree that night than David and Florence Payson had in the big living room of their lonely ranch house.

They took very few of the presents from the tree that evening. It was enough to admire them, and to dance round and round the tree in search of the treasures hidden among the branches. When the next morning came they were shouting "Merry Christmas!" before their parents were awake, and were at the tree as soon as it was light enough to see.

At breakfast David suddenly asked, "Does everyone have Christmas?"

"Everyone?" repeated Mr. Payson. "Well, I'm afraid some have a good deal more Christmas than others."

David looked thoughtful. "Do you suppose that family in the log cabin over behind the bluff has any Christmas at all?"

"Perhaps not," admitted Mr. Payson, and Mrs. Payson suddenly had the air of a person who all at once remembers something very important.

David looked hard at his plate, and then he said: "Perhaps we ought to take Christmas over to them. We have so much that we can spare a little, can't we?"

"Of course we can, David," said his mother promptly. "I'll fill a big basket with good things, and you and your father can carry it right over."

But before the basket was filled, a very natural thought came to Florence.

"How can it be Christmas to them without a tree?" she asked.

"They shall have a tree," said Mr. Payson. "Come, David, we'll get one right now."

David and his father found an axe and hurried off to a clump of small pines that grew near the river; there Mr. Payson cut down the most shapely one he could find. When they returned with it, Mrs. Payson and Florence had two baskets ready instead of one. Into the first basket they had put food and clothing. Into the second they had put some of the ornaments and holly that had decorated their own tree, and also a generous part of the fruit, candy and toys.

"Now we'll be Santa Claus & Co.," said Mr. Payson. "David, you and Florence can ride old Diamond and drag the tree. I've tied a rope to it. I'll go ahead on General with the baskets."

That was the way the strange procession set out. There was a light snow on the ground, but not enough to make travel hard, and the two miles were

soon crossed. General was faster than Diamond, and a little while before the children reached the cabin they met their father returning.

"I've left the baskets on the brow of the hill," he said. "You can easily drag them down to the door. You two are really Santa Claus & Co., you know."

So, suddenly and without any warning whatever, Christmas came to the log cabin. The family there had staked out a claim the summer before, and they had little more than the land itself. There were no signs of any holiday celebration anywhere about the shabby little place. It was indeed an amazed man that opened the door to the children's knock.

"How do you do?" said David. "We've brought Christmas!"

"Brought what?" the man said uncertainly.

"We've brought Christmas," repeated David, and he pointed to the tree and to the two big baskets that he and Florence had dragged down the slope to the door.

As he spoke, a woman joined the man at the door; three little children were clinging to her skirts.

"Christmas!" she exclaimed, holding up her hands. "Is this Christmas Day? I declare, we'd lost track of the days altogether! Why, you blessed angels, where did you come from?"

"We're not blessed angels," said Florence. "We're Santa Claus & Co., and we live on the Payson ranch over on the river."

"Well, well!" said the man. He began to under-

stand what it all meant. "Come right in. I'll tie the horse."

David and Florence stamped the snow off and went inside, dragging their gifts. The cabin was so small that they had to cut off the top of the tree before they could stand it up in the room. Then they all joined in hanging up the decorations and the gifts. The three children had said scarcely a word at first, but they grew noisy with happiness as the tree slowly began to display its wonderful fruit before their eyes. Perhaps it was the most beautiful Christmas Day that ever came to three little folk who had not even known that it *was* Christmas until nearly noon. And when the big parcels of clothing were taken from the tree and opened one by one there were tears of happiness in the grown people's eyes.

Late that afternoon David and Florence mounted Diamond, waved good-by and rode back to the ranch.

"Which Christmas celebration was the better?" asked their mother, when they had told the story of their visit to the log cabin.

"Both were wonderful," said David, "but somehow we were even happier there than here."

"I suppose it was because the first was a getting Christmas and the second was a giving Christmas," said Florence.

And in that sage remark Florence showed where the richest happiness of the Christmas season lies.

THE SECRET CHRISTMAS TREE [1]

Elsie Singmaster

In the kitchen of the little house on the mountain-side there was only one sound, the whirring of a sewing-machine. The kitchen was a pleasant place. There was a glowing fire in the stove, a brightly striped rag carpet on the floor, and a red cloth on the table. In three of the four deeply embrasured windows were potted geraniums. By the fourth stood the machine which whirred so busily.

It was Christmas eve, and if a little shawl and sunbonnet and a little boy's overcoat hanging on pegs behind the door were any sign, there were children in the house. But there was no sign of Christmas; there were no stockings hung before the fire, there was no tree, there were no presents. The mother who turned the machine was making men's shirts of coarse fabric. To her right on a table lay piles of separate portions of shirts—sleeves, fronts, bands, cuffs; on the floor to her left, a great heap of finished garments. Her bent head was motionless; she was able to shift the material upon which she was working from one side to the other without moving her shoulders or lifting her eyes, so that she

[1] By permission of the author and the "Outlook."

seemed to work upon an unending seam. She had set herself the finishing of a certain number of dozen before the New Year, and she had her task almost finished, though it was only Christmas eve.

By the table sat an old man. He had a bright face and blue eyes; one would have said he had still a good deal of the energy and strength of his youth. He was reading the Christmas story in the Bible, but his eyes strayed often from the page, whose contents he knew by heart, to the figure by the machine. Once when the left hand swept to the floor a finished garment he started from his chair. But the right hand was already gathering together the pieces of another, and he sank back.

When the shrill little clock on the mantel struck eleven and the deft hand gathered up still another garment, the old man tiptoed to the door and opened it. He went across the yard and there entered a little shop and struck a match. Then he exclaimed in joy over the product of his own hands.

"It's the handsomest I ever seen!" said he.

Almost filling the little shop, its proud head bent, its wide arms spread benignantly, stood a Christmas tree, gorgeous, glittering. Each tiny twig was tipped with a white ball; among the branches hung thick clusters of golden fruit. There was no other color; the old gentleman had, it was clear, fine taste in Christmas trees.

Beneath the tree was a village. Into green moss were stuck little tree-like sprigs of pine; scattered about were miniature houses. Here a little horse

carved out of wood drew a cart; here a flock of sheep wandered. There was a mill beside a glassy pond—a mill whose wheel, set in the brook in summer-time, would really turn. On one side of the garden stood a full-sized sled, upon it a chess-board, both hand-made, but neatly finished; upon the other side a doll's cradle with a little squirrel skin cut neatly for a cover, and two necklaces, one of rose hips and one of gourd seeds. Before the garden lay another group of presents—a neatly carved spool-holder and a little pile of skins for muff or tippet.

It was a beautiful sight even to one who had had no hand in the making. But now suddenly the old man's enthusiasm seemed to fail. He shook his head solemnly and went back to the house.

"I'll have to tell her soon," said he. "I'll have to tell her now."

Then the clock on the mantel struck twelve, the machine stopped, and the worker got stiffly to her feet. She was a tall, strong person, with a sad, preoccupied face. It was difficult to believe that she was the daughter of the little blue-eyed old man. At once he, too, rose and laid his book on the table. He looked up at the tall figure as though he were a little afraid of it.

"Susan," said he, "are you tired?"

"Yes," answered Susan.

"Susan," the old man began with a little gasp, "I wish you'd—" He looked longingly toward the door which led out toward the little shop.

"You wish I'd what, gran'pap?"

The old man's courage failed completely.

"I wish you'd go to bed, Susan."

"I am going," answered Susan. "Good night, gran'pap."

When the last sound of Susan's step had died away, gran'pap put coal on the fire and blew out the light.

"Oh, my! oh my!" said he. "What will she say when she finds it out?"

Then, slowly, forgetting that the lamp burned in the little shop across the yard, he climbed the stairs.

It was almost three months since the subject of Christmas had been broached in the little house. Then, one pleasant October afternoon, when the children left the main road and turned in at the by-road which led toward home, they found gran'pap sitting on the fence. He missed the children, who, dinner-pail and books in hand, walked two miles to the schoolhouse before half-past eight in the morning and did not return until half-past four in the afternoon. Thomas could have covered the distance much more speedily, but little Eliza could not walk fast. Now in October, the sun was already near its setting.

Gran'pap had a knife in his hand and was whittling something very tiny. When the children came in sight, he put both knife and handiwork into his pocket. He greeted them with a cheerful shout, and they smiled at him and came up slowly. Thomas and Eliza took their pleasures very soberly. Though gran'pap had lived with them since spring, they were

not yet accustomed to his levity, fascinating as it was.

Eliza took his hand and trotted in a satisfied way beside him. She was a fat little girl, and her old-fashioned clothes made her look like a demure person of middle age. Thomas stepped along on the other side, trying to set each foot as far ahead of the other as gran'pap did.

"Well," said gran'pap, "here we are!"

"And what," said Thomas, with a happy skip and a wave of the dinner-pail, "what are we going to do to-night?"

Gran'pap sniffed the sharp air, which promised frost.

"Wait till you hear the chestnuts rattlin' Saturday!" said he. "I have poles ready for beatin' 'em, and I made each of you a pair of mittens for hullin' 'em."

Saturday's pleasure, while delectable, was still too far away and too uncertain for Thomas.

"But to-night, gran'pap, what about to-night?"

"To-night," said gran'pap, solemnly, having approached the greater joy through the less, "to-night we make our plans for Christmas!"

"For Christmas?" said Thomas and Eliza together.

"Why, you act as though you never seen or heard of Christmas!" mocked the old man. "As though you were heathen!"

"We haven't seen Christmas," said the little girl.

"I did once," corrected Thomas. "There was a tree with bright gold things on it and lights. We had it in the house. I guess 'Lizie couldn't remember; she was very little." He drew closer to the old man and spoke in a low tone, "He was here still."

"But last Christmas and the Christmas before. You had a tree then?"

"No," insisted the little boy.

"Why, there's trees in plenty!" cried gran'pap. "But perhaps," added he, hurriedly, "perhaps she couldn't get any one to cut it for her. But you had presents!"

"The Snyder children had a present," said little Eliza. "It was a sled, Sandy Claus brought it."

"But *you* had presents," insisted gran'pap.

"No," said Thomas and Eliza together.

"I guess she was very busy," said gran'pap, with a frown. Then face and voice brightened. "But this year I'm on hand to cut the tree and I'm on hand to trim the tree."

The children looked up at him. It was clear that they had not entire faith in gran'pap's powers.

"And presents," continued gran'pap. "If you could have your choice of presents, what would you like to have?"

"I would like a gun," said Thomas.

"I would like—" Little Eliza gave a long, long sigh—"I would like a locket. I saw one in a picture."

"I do not know what you will get," said the old man, "but you will get something."

Then gran'pap hurried his own steps and theirs. "She'll be lookin' for us, children. Mooley's to be milked and wood's to be fetched."

Further progress was swift, for the road descended sharply. Under the shelter of a small cliff-like elevation stood the little house, startlingly white in the thickening darkness. It was a lonely place, entirely out of sight of other houses. Though it was protected from the coldest of the winter winds, it was not out of reach of their mournful sound.

From the kitchen window a bright light shone. Susan lit the lamp by her machine early. They could see her head and shoulders plainly as she bent over her work. At sight of her gran'pap and the children became silent.

"She's always busy," said gran'pap, after a moment. "She's wonderful, she is."

Thomas and Eliza made no answer. They had had no experience with a mother who was not perpetually busy. Gran'pap began to whistle, as though to warn her of their presence, and she lifted her head and looked out into the dusk. Her face, now as always intensely grave and preoccupied, brightened a little. The company of a grown person must have been a blessing in this quiet spot. For three years Susan had lived here alone with her children.

Gran'pap did not go at once into the house, but took from the bench beside the door a large milk-pail and went to the barn. The children followed him, and stood just inside the door, listening to the

milk rattling into the pail. Gran'pap talked to Mooley, complimenting her upon her sleek coat and her beautiful eyes, upon her gentleness, and upon the abundance of her milk. When he had finished, he and the children went into the house together. Thomas took off his cap and Eliza her shawl and sunbonnet, and gran'pap hung them up on the high pegs. Then he looked sorrowfully at the figure before the sewing-machine.

"Ain't you stopping yet, Susan?"

"I must make one more," came the answer from the bent head. "The man comes to fetch them tomorrow."

"But not till afternoon, Susan, and see all you have done!"

Susan made no answer. Stepping quietly, gran'pap poured the milk into crocks, and carried the crocks into the cellar. When he returned, he gave the fire a little shake and began to get supper. He set the table and cut the potatoes and meat for stew, and put the stew on the stove. As he sliced the onion he made queer grimaces to amuse Thomas and Eliza. When a savory odor began to rise, the figure at the machine turned.

"You needn't 'a' done that, gran'pap!"

"Oh, yes, Susan. Now when you're done, supper'll be ready."

The machine whirred a little faster, the hands moved a little more swiftly. The sleeves of a shirt were added to the body, the band was put in place. Once Susan sighed, but so quickly did the whirring

sound begin once more that the sigh reached the ears of no one but herself.

The two children sat, meanwhile, upon the settle, their school-books in their hands. But they did not study. They pondered upon what gran'pap had said. Gran'pap had brought many miracles to pass. It was possible that he would bring this heavenly one to pass also. Sometimes they whispered to each other.

When the whirring machine stopped and the mother pushed back her chair, gran'pap announced the feast ready. Susan carried the lamp from the machine to the table. She looked wretchedly tired. She rubbed her hand across her forehead, and when she sat down at the table she shielded her eyes from the light.

For once the children did not see that she was tired, for once they burst without thought into speech. Gran'pap's promise had intoxicated them.

"Gran'pap says we will have a Christmas," said Thomas, before he had lifted his spoon.

"With a big tree. He will cut it."

"And with presents," said Eliza.

"I would like a gun," said Thomas.

"And I a locket," said Eliza.

The mother shivered. She put her hands again to her forehead and closed her eyes.

"No," said she. "There will be no Christmas."

"But, Susan—"

Susan looked straight at her father. Her answer was final, but it was not rude; it sounded cruel,

but the old man was neither hurt nor offended.

"This is my house, father. There can be no tree and no presents. I cannot stand a tree, and I have no money for presents."

The old man uttered a single "But"—then he said no more. The faces of Thomas and Eliza dropped, but they said nothing. After a while they looked furtively at their grandfather, as though to see how this correcting of his plans affected him. When they saw that tears dropped from his eyes, they looked down upon their plates.

But grandfather was not long sad. He helped Susan to clear the table, then he sat down with the children. When they had finished their sums and had learned their spelling lesson and had read—toes on the stripe in the carpet, backs straight, books held in a prescribed manner—their reading lessons, he drew animals for them and cut rows of soldiers for Thomas and babies for Eliza. Their mother folded the shirts she had finished, laid fresh work on the machine for the morning, and sewed for an hour by hand on a dress for Eliza. Then she bade the children go to bed.

"Are you going to sit up, gran'pap?" she asked, gently.

"A little," said gran'pap.

"Good-night," said Susan.

Gran'pap sat by the table for a long time, his head on his hand. Gradually the expression of his face changed from sadness to a grim yet tender determination.

"We will see," said he aloud.

Then he read a chapter in his Bible and went to bed.

On Saturday gran'pap and the children went chestnutting. Their luck was amazing. After enough chestnuts had been reserved to supply the family's most extensive needs, there were ten quarts to be sold. With the money they bought ten spools of thread for Susan.

"You'll get more for your work if you don't have to pay your money for thread," said gran'pap.

Susan gave a little gasp. One who did not know her might have thought that she was about to cry. But Susan never cried.

"You oughtn't to have spent your money for me," she said.

If gran'pap was disappointed or grieved because Susan had said that the children could have no Christmas, he did not show it. He kept the wood-box full, he drove Mooley along the roadside to find a little late grass, and he heard the children say their lessons. When he was not thus occupied, he was in his little shop across the yard. Thither he had brought from his old home a jig-saw, a small turning lathe, and sundry other carpenter tools. He had here a little stove, and here on stormy days he worked. On pleasant days he made repairs to the house and barn, so that they should be winter-tight.

"The squirrels have thick coats," said he. "Look out for cold weather!"

As a matter of fact, gran'pap disregarded entirely his daughter's prohibition. When the children were at school and late at night, gran'pap was at work. He carved the animals for the garden and made the little houses and the cradle and the chessboard, and he gilded walnuts and hickory nuts to hang upon the tree, and popped the corn to make the little balls for the finishing of each branch. It was a long task; gran'pap often sat up half the night. Sometimes he worked in hope, sometimes in despair.

"When she sees it in its grandeur, she will feel different," said he when he was hopeful.

"Trouble's got fixed on her mind," said he when he despaired. "Perhaps she can't change any more."

"But I'll try"—this was the invariable conclusion of grandfather's meditations. "For the sake of her and these children, I'll try."

Several times gran'pap was almost caught. The odor of popcorn was sniffed by Thomas and Eliza, returning a little earlier than usual from school, and a large supply had to be handed over to them. A spot of gilding on gran'pap's coat was explained with difficulty. For the last days after the great tree had been dragged into the shop and set up gran'pap was in constant fear.

"On Christmas eve, after those children are in bed, I'll take her over," planned gran'pap. "I'll have a light burning. When she sees the tree, she'll feel different."

But now Christmas eve was past and Susan had

not been led to the little shop. Susan had gone to her room and gran'pap had gone to his and Christmas morning was almost at hand. Gran'pap had never been so miserable.

"She'll never forgive me," said he, as he lay down upon his bed and looked up at the stars. "Oh, dear! oh dear!"

At two o'clock gran'pap woke, conscious of a disturbance of mind. He lay for a moment thinking of Susan, then he realized that it was another uneasiness which had disturbed him.

"I left that light burning!" said he, as he sprang out of bed.

He dressed quickly, and went down the stairs into the kitchen. To his consternation the door stood ajar.

"Burglars!" said gran'pap. Then gran'pap stood still. The shop was on the side of Susan's room; he saw in the dim firelight that Susan's shawl was gone from its hook.

"Oh my! oh my!" said gran'pap, as he made his way across the yard.

Then he came to another abrupt pause in his progress. He heard a sound, a strange sound, the sound of crying. He tiptoed closer to the door of the shop. Within sat Susan upon a low bench, her head bent low, her hands across her face. He could see her shoulders heave, he could hear the pitiful sound of her sobbing.

Gran'pap was in despair. He did not know what

he should do, whether he should go forward or back. It was evident at least that his plan had not been successful.

"She's never cried before," said he.

Then, seeing Susan rise, he took a middle course and stepped into the shadow of the little building. Susan did not give another glance at the beautiful tree with its out-stretched arms; she went across the yard, still crying, and into the house.

"She even forgot to lock the door," said gran'pap, as he went into the shop.

He stood for a moment and looked at the tree.

"We can keep the door locked," said he, mournfully. "I can give 'em the things another time. Perhaps she would let me give 'em each one thing this morning."

Then gran'pap heard a stir, the sound of a footstep, the rustle of approaching skirts. He turned and faced the door.

"Susan!" said he.

It was Susan come back, Susan with a burden in her arms. She looked at her father with a start. Her face was different. It was suddenly clear that she had been a beautiful girl. She laid her burden upon the little bench.

"Here is a little rifle that was his father's," said she. "And here is a little chain and locket that was mine. You put them under the tree, gran'pap."

"Oh, Susan!" said the old man.

But Susan was already at the door. There she

turned and looked back. Again she was crying, but she was smiling, too. It was plain that for Susan the worst of grief was past.

"Merry Christmas, gran'pap!" said she. "You'd better go to bed."

"Same to you!" faltered gran'pap.

Then he took the little rifle and the chain and locket in his hands and hugged them to his breast.

"Oh my! oh my! oh my!" said gran'pap. "What will those children do!"

HOW OLD MR. LONG-TAIL BECAME A SANTA CLAUS [1]

Harrison Cady

"No, sir-ree, you don't catch me giving anything to Christmas charity. No, sir-ree! It's all nonsense anyway," said old Mr. Long-Tail as he slammed his door shut with a great bang right in the face of a startled snowbird who had called to solicit a contribution for the Christmas fund for the poor and needy.

Then with a frown he turned, drawing his old padded dressing gown more closely about him, and hobbled over to his large easy-chair before the blazing fire. Seating himself among its cushions he proceeded to pour out a steaming bowl of broth from a copper pot and to help himself to a bit of toast from a trivet before the fire.

"Ha, ha!" he squeaked. "This is pretty snug," and his lips curled into a satisfied smile as he glanced over to where the boisterous snowflakes were dashing against the window pane.

"Who-o-o! Who-o-o!" whistled the cold North Wind as it rattled the shutters.

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"Crackety-crackety," answered back the leaping flames in the grate with a merry shower of sparks.

Yes, Mr. Long-Tail was snug—very, very snug. His comfortable little house fairly glowed with warmth, and its pantry shelves sagged under their weight of good things. So, on this cold winter's day, the Day-Before-Christmas, he of all the many forest folk could afford to scoff and shoo away unwelcome callers. For why should he worry about the needy and the cold? His shelves were full and his fire was warm. Besides, did he not have many storehouses filled to overflowing?

But many there were in the great world who were not as free from worry as Mr. Long-Tail. Many days of heavy storms and cruel winds had drifted the snow and covered fields and forests alike with a thick white mantle which, freezing, had made it almost impossible for many little creatures to reach their hidden stores or to find a stray berry.

For weeks past they had been watching and waiting in the hope of better weather. Christmas was drawing near, and they had planned a grand celebration around a great fir tree which grew on a lofty knoll at the very edge of the forest. They had planned to trim it from top to bottom with long garlands of holly, while myriads of blazing candles would glisten and sparkle as they shed their light upon boughs heavily laden with presents.

Then one day came Bad Weather, and with him a great blizzard which howled and shrieked and added huge drifts of snow. The little forest people looked

out from their windows to see the blizzard imps dancing in glee, and as days went by they slowly gave up hope of the great Christmas celebration. Many tiny creatures watched their storehouses of provisions gradually disappear under the snow, and each day saw the list of the needy increase.

So the Day-Before-Christmas found every little eye carrying a look of worry and every little voice sobbed: "We can do but little for this Christmas, and that only for the very poor," all but old Mr. Long-Tail. His eyes held no look of worry. He was in a class by himself, for, as sometimes happens, not any of his storehouses were buried and every snowflake that fell before his door seemed to be instantly whisked away by the North Wind.

And so he sat before his fire and drank his broth and wheezed in his most disagreeable voice: "Christmas! Bah! I'll have none of it!"

For to explain: Old Mr. Long-Tail was a rat, and a very miserly one at that. In fact, he traced his pedigree directly back to the great family of Miser Rats, who had a habit of gathering hoards of curious things and tucking them away in funny little storehouses where one could find everything from an old button to a bit of brightly colored glass, along with queer dried roots and vegetables. Old Mr. Long-Tail had lived a long time and, as he had likewise inherited the family traits, his storehouses were many.

So he sat all alone the Day-Before-Christmas, buried in his great armchair, and thought only of how very comfortable he was—he, the very richest

creature in the great forest. But old Mr. Long-Tail was not happy, for with all his great riches there was one thing more he longed for—that was a certain kind of yellow corn, and that corn was hidden away in a certain corn bin in a certain old barn a goodly distance away.

"Ah! If I only had a little of that fine corn for my Christmas dinner," sighed old Mr. Long-Tail, for secretly he did intend to celebrate Christmas Day, but all by himself.

Finally he went to the window and peered out. "Whew! It's a pretty rough day, but I believe I might make it," he exclaimed as he drew on his big coat and wound his woolen scarf about his neck. Then he threw an empty sack over his shoulder and, buckling on a pair of snowshoes, headed straight for that distant barn.

Reaching it after a very long and difficult trip, he removed his snowshoes and crawled under the old building until he came to a convenient crack in the floor, and raising himself carefully he crept noiselessly within. Everything was silent and deserted except for the groaning of the wind about the eaves. Mr. Long-Tail lost no time in getting across the floor to a large wooden bin beside the wall, and he sped quickly along its side until he came to an opening, and then, with a hurried look over his shoulder, he stepped inside—not inside the bin, but right into a large box trap, the cover of which dropped with a thunderous clap, and old Mr. Long-Tail found himself a prisoner.

It was all so sudden and unexpected that it quite took his breath away. He tried to find a way of escape, but there was no escape for old Mr. Long-Tail. Exhausted, he crouched down and moaned, "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I'm caught! I'm caught!" and his falling tears went splash as they fell on the floor of his prison.

Yes, he was caught, and caught so well that unless something unforeseen happened he was doomed to spend his Christmas Day in that box trap. Poor old Mr. Long-Tail, who had planned to celebrate all alone with a delicious feast!

One hour passed; then another; then many more followed, and Mr. Long-Tail commenced to feel cold and hungry—yes, hungry right in that terrible trap in that well-filled corn bin. He shivered and shivered until the old box trap fairly made the corn rattle.

"Hush! Hush! What's that?" whispered one little snowbird to another as they huddled under the eaves of the old barn. "I hear sumfin."

Just then old Mr. Long-Tail gave a low moan.

"Whew!—Someone is in distress," cried the little snowbirds together as they cocked their heads to one side and listened.

Again came a moan.

"Whew! Some poor soul is in distress and we must help him."

And those two little snowbirds spread their wings and went whirling down to a window sill, and finding a broken pane they poked their heads in and listened until they heard the sob again.

Then they both peeped loudly: "Who's there?"

Faintly from the bin came a plaintive cry: "Help! Help! It's me, poor Mr. Long-Tail."

The two little snowbirds without hesitation flew right into the old barn and commenced to investigate.

"It's old Mr. Long-Tail all right," said one as he spied the tip of the rat's tail protruding from the end of the box. "Oh! So you are the crabbed old fellow who shooed us away from your door this morning," said the other upon recognizing Mr. Long-Tail's voice.

Mr. Long-Tail sobbed: "Set me free, and anything I own is yours."

"We are going to set you free all right," cried the little birds, "but we don't want anything of yours. No, sir. We only accept presents from willing givers, and just to show you, we are going to return good for evil." And straightway they began to dig those yellow ears of corn from under the old box trap. Suddenly it fell on its side and the cover opened enough for Mr. Long-Tail to slip out. He didn't stop, and he didn't even thank those little snowbirds for saving his life. No. He only ran just as fast as his legs would carry him straight for his home.

"My! That was a narrow escape," he puffed as he bolted his heavy door. "You don't catch me leaving this snug little house again"; and he stirred the fire and dropped down into his big easy-chair.

For a long, long time he sat and looked into the crackling flames as they danced and leaped up the

chimney. Then gradually old Mr. Long-Tail commenced to see strange shapes. Curious visions appeared—visions new and strange; and along with them came troubling thoughts, and, do all he could, he couldn't shut them out.

As the flames danced they shaped themselves into weird pictures of huddled creatures bent with cold and hunger, as they drew their cloaks about them. He could hear the roar of the winter tempest; he saw lines of empty stockings and heard plaintive calls for food. Then he saw a score of rich storehouses filled to overflowing, with doors heavily barred, while before them walked a grotesque figure, and that figure was turning away groups of starving forest folk. And, last of all, he saw two tiny snowbirds helping someone out of a trap, someone who whined and whimpered and cried: "Help! Help! It's me, poor Mr. Long-Tail."

This was too much for him. He jumped suddenly to his feet and cried: "That's me, a mean old miser, who does nothing for anyone but himself. The poor and needy I turn away, and I don't even thank those who save my life—me, poor old Miser Long-Tail."

Ashamed and humbled he sat down again and remained motionless for a long, long time. Then, with a sudden cry of joy, he jumped to his feet and looked at the clock.

"Hurrah! There's yet time. There are still a few hours left," he cried as he drew on his coat and, gathering a pile of empty bags together, he disappeared into the night.

The Night-Before-Christmas! That magic hour of all the year when Santa Claus, behind his team of reindeer steeds, rides hither and thither from one chimney top to another. But on this particular night the little creatures of the great forest had given up all hope of any Christmas visitor and were huddled in their beds for warmth. They were fast asleep, dreaming their troubled dreams of empty shelves and stockings. Outside the great world lay covered with ice and snow, for the blizzard had gone on its way and a cold winter moon shone on the hanging icicles.

Then suddenly there came, at the exact hour of twelve, the ringing of a bell. The little people awoke with a start and in excited voices cried: "It's a Christmas bell! It's a Christmas bell!"

In a flash they were out of their beds, and, hurriedly dressing, they scampered toward the echoing bell.

And what do you suppose they saw?

A smiling old rat, who, with the aid of his long tail, was ringing the bell! While before him on the ground was spread a wonderful collection of Christmas gifts, and above all was the sign:

PEACE ON EARTH
AND GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN
A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!
FROM MR. LONG-TAIL.

THE STORY OF THE FIELD OF ANGELS[1]

Florence Morse Kingsley

In the deep valley below Bethlehem an undulating meadow stretches east and west, its grass starred thick with blossoms in the days after the autumn rains. The villagers call it the Field of Angels, though to some it is known as the Place of the Star. In the days of the Cæsars the turrets of Migdol Edar, the shepherds' watch tower, still looked down upon the place, though shepherds had long ceased to watch their flocks there by night.

Six miles to the north, behind the scarred shoulders of the ravaged hills, lay shamed and desolate Jerusalem. There was no longer a temple therein whither the tribes of Israel could go up to praise and magnify the name of Jehovah. Of all that great and glorious Zion there remained only a place for wailing by a ruined wall.

But flowers bloomed again in the red tracks of the Roman armies, and again there were little children to whom the horrors of that time of death were only as a tale that is told between waking and sleeping. When the sun shines in unclouded heavens, and myriads of flowers wave in the sweet wind, and the

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lark floods his acres of sky with down-dropping melody, what young thing will lament ruined temples or yet vanished cities, be they never so glorious? And so, the children were plucking the first flowers in the Field of Angels with shouts and laughter.

In the dwarfed shadow of Migdol Edar sat an old man who talked with himself in the midst of his great silver beard, his blue eyes shining like twinkling pools amid the frosty sedge of a winter's morning. "The young things crop the blossoms like lambs," he muttered, and stretched his withered hand to gather a tuft of the white, starlike flowers. Then he smiled to see a troop of little ones running toward him fearless as the lambs to which he had likened them.

First came a tall girl of ten, her clear olive cheek shaded by a tangle of curls; she held a flower-crowned baby in each hand. Behind her lagged three or four smaller girls and half a score of boys, shyer and more suspicious than their sisters.

"Good sir, wilt thou gather flowers in the Angel Field?" demanded the tall girl fixing bright, questioning eyes upon the stranger.

"Thou hast said truth, maiden," answered the old man.

"I have come from over seas to gather them. And I will also tell thee one thing. Seest thou how many blossoms grow in this low valley? There grows a shining thought for every flower; these also would I gather."

The girl shook her head. "We have found no

shining thoughts in this field, honorable stranger," she said. "Here are star flowers, and blue lilies of Israel, and anemones purple and scarlet. There are no flowers like those of the Angel Field. But I would that we might see the shining things which thou hast gathered."

"Sit ye down upon the grass, every child of you," cried the old man, his blue eyes beaming with delight, "and I will show you my shining thoughts, for in truth they are fairer than the flowers which perish in the plucking. See, child, the blue lilies of Israel how they droop and wither, and the star flowers drop their petals like early snow; but I will show you that which can never perish. Look you, children, I was no taller than yon little lad—he with the scarlet tunic; and I wandered with the shepherds in this field—which in those days was known only as the valley of flocks—gathering flowers and minding the paschal lambs. They strayed not far from their mothers. Great Jerusalem was in its latter glory, and a marvelous bright star shone in the heavens. Wise men there were who declared that the star heralded the birth of Israel's deliverer, He who should be King of kings and Lord even of the Romans. The shepherds talked of these things in the night watches, and I, folded in my father's abba, listened between dreams.

" 'Twas in this very spot we gathered on the night of which I will tell you. My father, the head shepherd, and very learned in the Psalms and Prophets, sat silent while the others talked softly of the flocks

and of the weather, which was uncommon mild for the time of year, and of the pilgrims who had gathered out of all the provinces to pay tribute to the heathen emperor. The heavens were dark save for the great star which shamed all the rest into twinkling sparks. The young moon hung low in the west. I saw all this from the shelter of my father's cloak, and was content even as the lambs which lay close to the warm hearts of their mothers in the soft, damp grass.

"Suddenly my father lifted up his great voice. 'The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silent before Him!' So spake he, and the others, marveling, held their peace. My young eyes were just closing in a dream of peace, but they opened wide at sound of my father's solemn voice: 'Behold I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple. Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts!'

"Then did the earth swoon and tremble—or so it seemed to my young fancy—and the light of the star on a sudden blazed forth with myriads of sparkling rays, of all colors splendid and rare, and radiance presently took shape to itself and became the figure of a man clad in dazzling garments who stood over against the sleeping flocks. He spoke, and his voice was as the voice of Jordan when he rolleth his spring floods to the sea. Every man of the shepherds was fallen to the ground with fright; but I

lay unafraid in the shelter of my father's cloak and saw and heard all.

" 'Fear not,' said the shining one, 'for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.'

"Then were the heavens and the silent valley and the heights of Bethlehem filled with shining ones, who lifted up their voices in songs the like of which never yet fell on mortal ears. 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!' The anthem rose and fell in glorious waves of melody toward the star blazing in mid-heaven. The voices passed singing into the silence, and the shining forms, blent once more with the celestial rays of the star, wavered for an instant before our dazzled eyes, and were gone.

"My father was the first to recover himself from that trance of wonderment. 'Let us now go even to Bethlehem,' he said, 'and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.'

"The shepherds girt themselves to depart, and I, creeping from the warm folds of the abba into the chill night, followed hard after them. Being low of stature—for I was no higher than yon little lad—I saw a thing which the others perceived not: the

soft, damp grass was starred with snowy blossoms both far and near where the feet of the angels had trod. I lagged behind to gather of them a great handful.

"The dim light of the inn swung half-way up the rocky steep, and there we waited in the darkness, my young heart beating loud in my ears, whilst my father parleyed with the keeper of the gate. 'There was no babe within,' the porter said, and would have shut the door fast in our faces but that my father, being a man of authority and insisting that it was even as he had said, presently pushed by him into the khan. And indeed there was no babe in all the place, only pilgrims lying close to the sleeping-lofts and their beasts which crowded the court-yards.

"I pulled my father's sleeve and whispered to him that the angel said we should find the Babe lying in a manger. And in truth, my children, when presently we were come to the place where the great oxen were housed from the winter's cold, we found the young mother and the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. He, the Salvation of Israel—the Messiah—the Desire of Nations! These eyes gazed upon Him in His beauty. These hands touched Him as He lay asleep in the manger nestled in His soft garments on the yellow straw."

The tremulous voice faltered—ceased. The old man bent forward smiling, as if once again he gazed upon the world's Savior asleep in His manger cradle.

One of the girls laid a timid finger on the border of the pilgrim's cloak. "And was He—like other babies?" she asked in a low voice.

"Like other babies?" smiled the old man. "Yea, verily, little one, He was fashioned in all points even as we are—thanks be unto Jehovah! Yet was He unlike—so wondrous fair, so heavenly beautiful was that Babe of Bethlehem as He lay even as an angel asleep in that humblest bed of all the earth. The milk-white blossoms I had gathered shone faint in the half darkness like tiny stars. I laid them at His feet and their fragrance filled all the place as incense."

The aged shepherd looked down at the flowers in his withered hands, his slow tears falling upon them like holy dew. Also he murmured strange words to which the children listened with wonder, albeit they understood them not at all. "Behold He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the World knew him not. For by Him were all things created that are in Heaven, and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers. These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness."

Then the children stole quietly away one by one, till presently they were again at play amid the myriad blossoms of the star flower. But the old man rested beneath the shepherds' tower, while the shadows lengthened across the Field of Angels.

SHOPPING WITH GRANDMOTHER MINTON[1]

Daisy Crabbe Curtis

"THERE!" said Grandmother Minton, standing stock-still in the middle of the sidewalk, all unmindful of the fact that she was blocking the way of the hurrying Christmas shoppers. "That child has hurt himself! I can tell by the way he cries. Pick him up, Susan!"

"O grandmother!" protested Susan. "He's dirty!"

"Bumps hurt a dirty boy just as much as a clean one," said Grandmother Minton.

Susan sighed, and with the air of a martyr lifted the weeping urchin to his feet.

"It's his forehead, poor child!" said Grandmother Minton, gently touching a red bump on the boy's forehead. "Don't cry, sonny; grandma's got somethin' in her little black bag that will stop the hurt. Here 'tis—arnica, and a nice clean handkerchief to bind it up with," she went on soothingly as she worked. "Feels better already, eh? And here's somethin' more to help," she added, popping a piece of white candy into his mouth. "That's good for the cry. All right, now?"

[1] This story was first printed in "Youth's Companion," December 28, 1916. Reprinted by permission of the author and "Youth's Companion."

"Grandmother, come!" whispered Susan with scarlet cheeks.

She was painfully embarrassed by the curious crowd that had collected about them.

"Wait till I see if he walks all right," said the old lady, whose face was filled with motherly anxiety.

"Of course he walks all right! Do come!"

The bystanders made way respectfully for the little old lady and her stylishly dressed granddaughter. Susan carefully avoided their glances, but Grandmother Minton beamed impartially upon them all from behind her massive-rimmed spectacles.

Would grandmother ever learn not to make herself so conspicuous, Susan wondered. Mother might have known that something like this would happen. She ought not to have insisted upon Susan's going with grandmother to the city, and on a shopping expedition, too! "Why," thought Susan, glancing at her companion, "even if grandmother wasn't always doing things that make people stop and look at her, they would look at her just the same because of her queer, old-fashioned clothes! Why will she insist upon making them herself, and all after the same old pattern, when father's ready and willing to buy her the best the stores afford? Why can't she be like Lillian Teller's grandmother, always dressed in fashion and with her hair stylishly arranged? And why will grandmother persist in carrying that absurd old black velvet bag everywhere she goes? Hasn't each of us, at some time or other, given her a new bag?"

"Why don't you take one of your new bags?" Susan had asked grandmother that very morning when they started for the train.

"It seems like they're too gorgeous," grandmother had said, "to hold my peppermint drops and snacks of medicine and pennies for the children, not to mention my packet of court-plaster and spectacle case and bit of thread and needle. The bags you dear people gave me just go with 'broidered handkerchiefs and smellin' salts and ten-dollar bills," she added, with a twinkle in her eye.

"But your black bag is so—shabby."

"Tut, child, it's an old friend grown shabby in helpin' me and others. Your grandfather gave it to me before he died and I came to live at your house. That bag's seen good times and bad times. It's taken medicine to the poor and the sick. It's carried my clean handkerchief and collection money to church. It's been to weddin's and funerals, and even carried a set of infant's clothes for a newborn babe of the Raffertys' that hadn't a stitch to its back. Why," said Grandmother Minton, tenderly smoothing its rusty drawing-strings, "you don't know how lonesome and homesick I'd feel without this bag!"

"Here we are at Trasher & Brown's," said Susan as they approached a great store. "Now, what's first on your list?" she asked briskly. "I'll just hurry her along," she thought, "and maybe we can catch the one-thirty train home."

"Let's see!" said Grandmother Minton, pulling a worn piece of paper from her bag. "You'll have to

read it for me, Susan. I left my readin' specs at home."

"Peppermint sticks," read Susan. "Candy's in the basement. Let's take the elevator."

"Department stores are funny," said Grandmother Minton, with a chuckle. "Candy, calicoes and furniture all mixed up together." They had reached the candy counter, and she addressed the clerk in a confidential tone. "Yes, I want peppermint sticks, red and white ones. They're the tastiest for Christmas. What? Oh, two dozen, I should say! Let me see, they're for the Raffertys and Bensons and Manders and— Best make it three dozen. What's that, Susan? A shopping card? You tell her how to make it out. I'm too old-fashioned for shopping cards, I guess. What next, Susan? Oh, yes, dolls! Nellie Rafferty wants a yellow-haired one. Can you tell me where the yellow-haired dolls are?" she asked the clerk. "Nellie Rafferty's set her heart—"

"I know where the dolls are, grandmother," said Susan hastily.

She did wish that grandmother would not always take the clerks into her confidence!

Grandmother Minton fairly reveled in the doll department. She went from one show case to another, exclaiming over the pretty curls and attractive dresses. Each doll brought for her inspection seemed more beautiful than the last, and she could not decide which one would best please ragged little Nellie Rafferty. Susan was in despair! It was after twelve o'clock and she had seen other items on grand-

mother's list; a fire engine, a red cart, some brown yarn, a girl's coat, infant's underwear, shoes and stockings. She fairly gasped. Why, they would be lucky if they reached home on the three-eighteen!

"Grandmother," she suggested, "how would it be if I bought some of the other things for you while you're selecting the doll? Shall I," consulting the list, "buy the girl's coat and the infant's underwear?"

"Why, you might, I suppose, though I'd counted on pickin' them out myself."

"It will save time if I do it."

"Well," agreed Grandmother Minton reluctantly, "I'll try and tell you exactly what I want. The coat's to be eight-year size, and mind, it must be durable. Like's not, it will be handed down from one child to another in the Benson family, and they're such husky young ones it'll have to be good and stout to stand the strain. The infant's underwear is to be one-year size and wool, Susan! Don't let them give you anything but wool."

"Yes, yes," said Susan, impatient to be off. "Stay right here, grandmother, until I come for you."

It took Susan much longer than she had expected to purchase the coat and underwear. She had to go to the third floor for the coat, and she found a sales clerk busy trying to please a most exacting customer, who seemed to want to examine every coat in stock before making a selection. When Susan's turn came, she hurriedly purchased a dark blue chinchilla and then went in search of the underwear.

The afternoon shoppers were beginning to throng the floors when Susan finally made her way back to the toy department. That, thought Susan, must account for the fact that, although she had nearly reached the spot where the dolls were sold, she had not yet caught a glimpse of a little white-haired lady in an old-fashioned black dress and with a shabby black velvet bag in her hand.

"This is the very counter where I left her," said Susan, with a puzzled frown. "She must be looking at some of the show cases near by, or perhaps she has walked a little way to look for me."

She was beginning to feel anxious, for she knew that Grandmother Minton would not be likely to wander about the big store for herself.

Susan began to thread her way among the shoppers, scanning each one sharply. At first she was deliberate and polite, but after she had circled several times round the toy department and still had caught no glimpse of Grandmother Minton's kind old face she became desperate and pushed her way rudely hither and thither. What had become of her grandmother? Was she wandering helplessly round with no one to pilot her? Would anyone notice that she was lost and try to help her?

Susan stopped short in her wanderings. A possibility that filled her with dread had flashed into her mind. Such things had happened to other people, she knew. Could it be that grandmother had been taken suddenly ill and been rushed to the hospital? What would father say? Was not Grandmother

Minton his own mother? Had he not cautioned Susan that morning to take the best of care of her and bring her safe home to him again? Now, she would have to telephone and tell him—oh, she could not! And what would mother say? And all the Raffertys and Bensons and Manders? They worshipped Grandmother Minton!

Some one grasped Susan's arm, and the polite voice of the floorwalker questioned her.

"What is it, miss? Have you lost your purse?"

Susan realized then that she had been wringing her hands and that tears were in her eyes.

"No!" she gasped. "I—I wish I had."

"Beg pardon?"

"I've lost my grandmother," explained Susan. "Have you seen her?"

The puzzled look upon the floorwalker's face caused Susan to be more coherent. She told him what had happened, and he suggested that she go to the waiting-room and rest while he went to the office and made various inquiries. He was sure that they would be able to find her grandmother. And, Susan, because she was bewildered and felt faint and weary and knew nothing better to do, acted upon his suggestion.

The waiting-room was filled with the usual number of weary shoppers, some of whom were trying to soothe fretful children. Susan sat down in one of the vacant chairs. It had been more than an hour since she had missed her grandmother. Could it be only yesterday that she had gone to her to have her

gloves mended at the very last minute, so that she might wear them to the concert? It seemed ages and ages ago. Grandmother had never been out of patience with Susan, not even during that week when she was taking her high-school examinations and was so snappy and cross to everyone.

"Oh," thought Susan remorsefully. "I'm just hateful to grandmother! It was wonderful of her to help that child this morning. I'm such a proud, stuck-up thing I'd have let him die, I suppose, rather than lift my hand to help him. Grandmother would help anyone who's in need. She'd give her last cent to—"

"There," said a cheery voice, "you look better! Wasn't it lucky I was near by when you felt faint?"

Susan turned sharply and her eyes opened wide. There, bending solicitously over a woman who lay on the divan, was grandmother! She had in her hand one of the little bottles from her black bag and was bathing and rubbing the sick woman's forehead. Susan held her breath and drew near. How infinitely dear grandmother was! She had taken off her coat and looked so quaint and grandmotherly in her fitted basque and softly shirred skirt. How suitably the close little bonnet framed the white hair, plump face and kind blue eyes!

Susan's gaze wandered to the woman to whom her grandmother was ministering. She was so stylishly gowned that Susan was astonished when she saw her face. It was much wrinkled and, in spite of the faint touch of rouge on the cheeks, looked ghastly. "She's

old," thought Susan, "in spite of her stylish, young-looking clothes. Why, she must be older than grandmother! Maybe she's a grandmother, too, but she doesn't look like a comfortable one. *She'd* never go into the kitchen and make doughnuts for me and mince pie for Brother Jack. She'd never help a dirty child that had hurt himself!"

"Grandmother!" called Susan softly.

"Well, Sue, child," said Grandmother Minton, with a welcoming smile, "so you've come for me! I aimed to get back to the doll counter before you came, but this lady was taken faint right near where I was, and of course, I came here with her. Lan's sake child, you look pale yourself! Sit right down in this chair. I'll have to rub your forehead, too."

"I'm all right now that I've found you. Oh, grandmother, I thought you were lost!"

"Well, well, I was comin' right back, Sue. Here's my handkerchief. There! I guess," said Grandmother Minton, with a smile, as she fumbled in her black bag, "if you are going to cry, I'll have to give you a candy drop like I gave that little boy this mornin'."

"Do," said Susan, laughing through her tears, "and get it from the bottom of your little black bag, grandmother!"

A MISLAID UNCLE[1]

E. Vinton Blake

Five feet eleven of vigorous, well-fed, clean-shaven humanity, a little past the middle age, enveloped in a fur-lined overcoat, and carrying a handsome dress-suit case; this was John James Alston of New York, a hard-headed, hard-hearted old bachelor, with no kith or kin in the world, that he knew. There might be a few distant cousins or so, somewhere out Connecticut way; he didn't know or care. He had worked his way in the world himself, and made a moderate fortune, and knew how to take care of it. What more did a man want?

The Pullman porters had eyed him respectfully, at intervals, all the way from New York: his air and apparel indicated wealth, and his manner commanded instant obedience. Nothing in his firm-set mouth, the poise of his head, his cool dignity, betrayed the fact that the habits of a lifetime were attacked and in danger of being carried by assault. And the besieger was a mite of a four-year-old girl, all daintiness and captivating ways, whose mother occupied a near-by chair in the Pullman car. The little miss persisted in hovering about the cold, quiet

[1] Reprinted from "St. Nicholas Magazine," with permission.

gentleman and attracting his attention. John James Alston rather liked children, when they were well-behaved; and when mama said, "No, no," and drew the intruder away, the dainty red lips quivered. In dread of an outburst,—John James disliked crying children—he suddenly emerged from his shell.

"Pray let her come, madam; I shall enjoy it," was what he said. And directly he found himself taken possession of in the most astonishing way, and made the recipient of all manner of Christmas confidences.

"You goin' home for Kis'mus?" she said, cuddling into his lap. Finding he had no friends to visit, no little girls to play with, she said she was "dreffful sorry." Then she told him about the delights of "gwanpa's" when all the uncles and aunts and cousins were assembled. When she got out at Stonington, he felt a great loss. And now, as he walked the platform at the Junction, waiting for another train, he was somehow conscious of a strange and unusual loneliness. It was two days before Christmas. All day he had seen jubilant family groups at stations welcoming their arriving relatives; all day he had heard talk of home-coming and Christmas gifts among children and grown-ups on the train. John James Alston, I am sorry to say, became decidedly cross. "I was stupid," he told himself, "to start anywhere on business at this season. I might just as well have waited till next week, and avoided all this nonsense." And he wished himself back again in his cozy bachelor apartments in New York.

His meditations had carried him thus far when somebody seized his hands. "Aren't you Uncle John from the West?" cried a girl's voice. And a boy's chimed in: "Of course it's Uncle John! How do you do, Uncle John?" Then childish accents uttered, "I know'd him by his picshur!" And hurrying across the platform, a stout, cheerful woman pushed the children aside, crying, "John Damon! And you wrote you didn't think you could come!" Then she shook him by both hands and kissed him impulsively.

John James Alston caught his breath. The woman was so wholesome and hearty, though she *did* wear a thick shawl and an unfashionable bonnet, that—well, he collected himself and managed to say, "Madam, there's a mistake"; but she didn't hear or pay the slightest attention to what he said.

"Billy, bring the horse around, quick," she commanded. "It's ten minutes before the other train comes. We'll just have time to get away. Old Griggs'll never get over being scared of the cars," with a smile to John James. "Dolly, don't hang on to your uncle so. Maidie, can't you get her away?"

"Want my nuncle to carry me," declared Dolly, the smallest girl, clinging to John James's immaculate glove. He looked down. The face that looked up was dimpling and sweet in its worsted hood, and golden curls peeped out all around it. He never was able to explain the impulse that moved him, and what followed was a wonderment to him all his life; but the protest died on his lips, and he picked up the smallest girl and hugged her. Then

and there he shook off John James Alston as he left the dismal Junction platform, and, as "Uncle John" from the West, submitted to be led to the waiting carryall.

"Get right in on the back seat," said the cheerful woman. "Maidie, you an' Dolly can sit back there, too. I'll drive. Or, no—Billy can drive." Sarah's grammar was not quite up to the mark but you can hear the like of it in the country any day.

They piled in jubilantly and pulled up the buffalo-robes. John James's dress-suit case was in the way, and he told Billy to put his feet right on it and never mind!

"Won't your brother Asher be glad to see you!" exclaimed the woman. "Le' 's see—it's full ten years, if 'tis a day, sence you came East. How *is* everything in Cheyenne?"

John James assured her that Cheyenne was all right.

"You must 'a' be'n lonesome sence Annie died. Pity you never had any children. Home wouldn't be home to me without children."

"That's true," said John James.

"I don't s'pose you remember Maidie—she was a baby when you saw her last." John said he hardly remembered Maidie. "An' Billy—he's ten; and Dolly, four—they've come sence you left us. They're both mine."

"And I've a little brother, Aunt Sarah," put in Maidie.

"Yes, Asher an' Mary's had both sorrow an'

joy," said the cheerful woman, more soberly. "They lost a little girl, but they have a little two-year-old boy. His name's John, after you."

"Oh, so I've a namesake," said John James. He tried to get his bearings, and kept his ears open for names and facts. But reflection was also at work; he remembered that the day after to-morrow was Christmas, and the uncle from the West had not one Christmas gift for his namesake or the family. He realized with a sudden alarm that he had to do something, and do it quickly.

"By the way, is there a long-distance telephone round here?" he asked.

"Why, yes; down at the depot," said Billy, pulling up. "Want I should drive back?"

"No; I'll just run over there, myself," said John James. "You keep old Griggs round the corner here. I'll be right back."

He made haste across the wide country square. Aunt Sarah, watching him, said, "He's spry, ain't he?" and then, "I guess he's well off. That coat didn't cost no small sum."

John James found the telephone, and got connections with a Boston business man whom he knew well. Before he had talked three minutes, the business man's hair began to rise on his head, and he interrupted to inquire if John James was really himself or another. With great irritation, John James replied in hasty language, and bade him confine his attention to the subject in hand. He talked for fully ten minutes. At the end he was assured

that his order was received and would be duly honored.

"And rush it!" was John James's parting injunction as he hung up the receiver.

The station-master eyed him queerly as he came out. "Le' 's see—you look like John Damon used to —not exactly, either—more cityfied! But you *be* him, ain't ye?"

"That's what they call me," replied John, and submitted to be greeted as an old friend in the jolliest way possible. He also acquired some new facts.

"Your father's feeble—very feeble," said the man. "I'm glad you were able to come home to spend Christmas with him."

"I find it hard to leave my affairs," soberly said John James.

"They said you wrote so. Wal, you'll find Asher some grayer, but jolly still. He's got the mor'gidge all paid off but five hundred or so. He was talkin' of old times only t'other day, and how much you boys used to think of each other. D'ye rember how he once took the whippin' 't was meant for you, an' never said nothin'?"

"I remember a good many things," said John James as he left him, and in a few minutes again took his place in the carryall.

He was becoming more and more interested in the family history which "Aunt Sarah" continued to give him, when, at last, the carryall turned up a farm-house lane, and they saw a woman step uncertainly to the side door.

"There's Mary," said Aunt Sarah, and the children began to shout: "Here's Uncle John!"

Asher Damon, the first to respond to the summons, stepped out of the door, a typical New England farmer, in his shirt-sleeves and overalls.

"By Jinks, this is great!" he exclaimed.

John James, descending, received and returned his vigorous hand-grip; kissed Mary, his sister-in-law; was rushed at and embraced by three strange women who addressed him as "Cousin John." Then they all stood in a group and talked at once. "But come in!" said Asher suddenly—"come in and see father. He'll be overjoyed. He's insisted on Sarah goin' to the depot every day for a week, on the chance of your comin'." So John James went in to see his father.

He trembled a little under the keen and searching gaze of the old man, who got up and took him by both shoulders, turning his face to the light.

"You're changed, boy, changed!" he said tremulously. "Seems like you're steadier, graver. But you've lost your wife Annie. It's natural, after all. It's a good deal to me to see you to-day."

And John James Alston suddenly shrank into himself and felt like the impostor he was.

"Yes, I think he's changed—a little," said Asher's wife, surveying him closely. "But it's ten years; and people and things don't stand still. There's the baby, your namesake, John."

She ran into the bedroom at a child's cry and brought out a round-faced, curly-haired two-year-

old, whom she deposited on Uncle John's knee. He said, "Great Scott!" and clutched the new burden awkwardly, conscious of extreme confusion of mind.

"That comes of not being used to children," cried Mrs. Sarah, merrily, catching at the child. "Here, Mary; he's not safe. John's got to have some lessons in baby-tending." And all the women laughed.

If John James Alston ever fancied a country life lacking in variety, he changed his mind from that day. They took him out to see the cattle, and Asher dwelt on their strong points. He was made to take note of the rakish, upward curve in the noses of the Berkshire hogs, and saw the prize pullets and the Toulouse geese. He heard about the rotation of crops. And though he tried his best to say the right thing at the right moment, he saw one and another look at him sometimes in a puzzled way that made his blood run cold. And this was a queer sensation for the dignified, self-possessed John J. Alston of New York.

That night he was shown to the best upstairs bedroom; there was just enough space for the mountainous bed, the bureau, washstand, and one chair. He turned back the heavy coverlets and stood regarding the swelling height before him. "Great Scott!" he murmured. "I never slept in a feather-bed in my life. Wonder how far I shall sink down."

When he was in, and the pillows heaped around him, he began to grow deliciously warm. "I don't care—I'm a rank impostor, I know, but I'll see this

thing through, now I've begun. I feel uncommonly like a boy." And he laughed outright.

The next day, to be safe, he devoted himself to the children, to the great relief of their busy mothers; and before night, Maidie, Billy, and Dolly were his devoted lovers. There were finger-marks on his shirt-front and wrinkles in his coat, due to his little namesake, who was quite ready to howl when separated from his Uncle John. Early in the day he took Asher aside and inquired about the express accommodations, intimating that he expected a Christmas shipment by express from Boston.

"Oh, all right!" said Asher. "We'll send up at five o'clock; the last express gets in then." And he felt a little curiosity, for the real John Damon was not wont to be over-generous.

More than once that day did John James wonder what had become of his other self, the city-man Alston, whom he had left on the station platform. John James was having the time of his life. Anybody who has ever enjoyed a country Christmas in a farm-house full of peace, good-will, and happy relatives will understand all about it. At dark Asher came in. "John!" said he. "You and Billy'll jes' have to go down to the depot—we're hustlin' to get the chores done."

"Certainly," said John James. "Billy, don't you want to go?"

"Sure!" said Billy. "I'll be through with these pigs in a jiffy, an' I'll be right along. You can be harnessing."

John James went out to the barn. He had never harnessed a horse in his life. He led out old Griggs, who marched deliberately to the water-trough and plunged his nose in.

John James took down a headstall at random, and old Griggs understood in about two minutes that he had to deal with inexperience, and refusing the bit, led the city-man a dance all over the barn floor. Then Billy came in.

"Here—hello!" said he. "What you doing with that work-harness, Uncle John? Here's the right one. An' the collar goes on first, anyway. Why, you've forgotten how to harness! Hi, you old rascal, stand still!"

John James had the mortification of beholding the ten-year-old corner old Griggs and equip him with the necessary rigging in no time at all.

"I thought you had a good many horses in your business, uncle," said Billy, fastening one of the traces, while his "uncle" tried the other.

"The men do a good deal of the harnessing," desperately said John James at a venture.

The box was at the station. It was decidedly a big box. It took John James and the depot-man to get it into the wagon. When the wagon, much heavier now, slid upon the horse's hocks, going down a steep incline on the return trip, there were prancings, suddenly uplifted iron heels, then a furious run.

Billy held on valiantly, and rebuked old Griggs in vociferous accents; while John James, acknowledging the master-hand, sat still and looked for a

soft place to fall in. Having at last pulled up, Billy got out to investigate.

"Well, I vow, Uncle John, if you didn't forget to buckle the britchen-strap on your side!" he exclaimed.

And John James, with a dreadful sense of mortification, blushed scarlet under cover of the dark.

By the time they got home the snow was falling quietly and steadily, and it increased as the night wore on.

Late at night, after the household were abed, John James and Asher opened the box. It was a surprise indeed—that box! The Boston man had fulfilled his commission admirably, and John James chuckled as he pulled out one article after another.

"We gener'ly have our presents on our plates or chairs at breakfast," observed Asher. "The womenfolks put 'em here, as you see," indicating the table in the living-room with its modest gifts. "The children hang their stockings by the fireplace; they like the fun of pullin' things out."

"Well, here's something for little John," said John James, unwrapping a gorgeous drum and a stunning horse with "truly" hair all over him. "And here, just undo that long box, Asher. Here are some good books for the children."

Asher opened the long pasteboard box. "Land o' Goshen!" said he, "I never see sech a doll. Looks like an angel gone to sleep."

"That's for Dolly; won't she squeal!" said John James. "Billy skates, doesn't he? These will fit him,

I hope—and here's a pair for Maidie. This—what's this? It's labeled 'for the girl.' " He tore a hole in the paper. "Oh, a dress. That's for Maidie, too."

"Here's a white knitted shawl for—whom? You know best about the women-folks. I had to just guess at it. Here's some fancy embroidered collars, and stuff of that sort."

"Mary would like the shawl, and Sarah the collars," said Asher, slowly.

"All right, put 'em there. Ah ha, now, this is the thing! Try on these rubber boots, Asher!"

"Hold on, John," said Asher, resolutely; "you jest go slow! Be you made of gold, or what? These things must 'a' cost a mint o' money!"

John James sat back on his heels and thought a moment. "I can afford it easily; I have been greatly prospered," said he.

"Wal, you're lucky—and this is a reg'lar windfall," said Asher, getting into the boots. John James laughed, slapping him on the back.

"Perfect fit. They're yours, Asher. Now lend a hand. A man's long dressing-gown—that's for father!"

"He won't know how to act," said Asher.

"Half a dozen boxes of candy—hope nobody will get ill from them," went on John James, still investigating. "Here's—oh, undo this carefully—a fur tippet for Mary!"

"Great snakes!" said Asher, handling it with reverence. "I never see no sech fur as this."

"Yes, it's a warm one, I hope," said John, from the depths of the box.

He brought out mittens for the children, a stunning suit for little John, dresses for Sarah, Mary, and the cousins, more books, mechanical toys that set Asher laughing as if he never would stop.

Asher gazed around the kitchen, which looked like a museum.

"I never see sech a sight," said he; "I'm sort o' bewildered. *Is* this you an' me, or some other fellows?"

"You'll find out if you don't wake up and put all these things on the plates and chairs where they belong. Asher, we must clear up these wrappings. Hold on!—here's something we overlooked." He picked up a small box containing four tiny boxes.

"Rings for the children, by jiminy!" said Asher, looking over his shoulder. "Lucky we didn't cram it into the kindlin's."

It was one o'clock before they got to bed; and it seemed as if they were only just asleep before the seven-o'clock alarm went off, and waked them up to a world of snow.

They slept later than usual, but there was a tremendous hustling in that house, once they were fairly awake. When all were dressed and had come down, the shrieks of the children and their own curiosity made it nearly impossible for the women to get breakfast. It was one of their Christmas rules that no gift on the table should be taken up till all

were at the board. But Dolly, with low "oh's" and "ah's" of delight, touched softly the pink toes and hands of the big "sleeping beauty" in her chair; for the box was too big to go on the table. All their chairs were full, and the steaming breakfast cooled before the jubilant household were ready to eat.

Asher opened his fine new pocket-book, and seeing a piece of paper in it, took it out, stared, put it back, looked at it again with a dazed expression, and got up, overturning his chair. His old father looked up from the warm dressing-gown they had put on him, and which he was smoothing like a pleased child.

"What ails ye, Asher?" asked the old man.

"Sit down, man, sit down!" said John James in an undertone, picking up the chair.

"Lawsee, but I can't! John, this is too much! Why, John, I never heard—"

"Oh, keep quiet, Asher! Sit down, I tell you!"

"Father, this is a cashier's draft on a Boston bank for five hundred an' fifty dollars. It pays the last o' the mor'gidge an' interest, father! John, I can't take it—after all this!" said Asher, waving his hands widely abroad at the gifts around him.

"Nonsense, Asher!—yes, you will, too. Man, I never had such fun in my life before! Pour him some coffee, somebody, please."

"John!" said Asher, gripping his hand hard and choking.

"You see, Asher, I thought 'twas high time you got paid off for that whipping you took for me long ago, when I deserved it."

"Oh, thunder!" said Asher, unable to speak another word.

They passed the day quietly together, and it seemed to John James that he never ate so tender a turkey, such exquisitely seasoned vegetables. The plum-pudding with its burning sauce capped the whole, and left them with serene souls.

When dark settled down, and the farm "chores" were done, candles and lamps lit the low-ceiled, comfortable old rooms, and with mirth and jollity they played Christmas games. John James had forgotten all about his other self—the city-man left on the depot platform. His oldest acquaintance wouldn't have known him as he "marched to Jerusalem," with his thick, grayish hair rumpled all over his head, or spun the tin pie-plate on the kitchen floor.

But suddenly there came a sound of bells, the tramp of a horse on the cleared path at the side door.

"Somebody's come in this snow," said Asher, going to the door. They all pressed forward to see.

"Well, I declare! Hello! Here ye all are!" cried a voice. "Ye didn't expect me, I'll be bound. I concluded to come, after all. I was snowed in last night, or I should 'a' got here this mornin'. Merry Christmas to all of ye!"

It was the *real* John Damon, covered with snow, hungry but jolly. Behind him the driver tugged his bag. John James Alston's heart gave a great bound, then sunk to the depths of his boots. Amid the amazed silence of the whole family, the real and

the false John Damon confronted each other.

"What—what—who's this?" stammered the newcomer, recognizing the resemblance in a moment, yet unable at once to grasp the astounding audacity of this stranger's performance. As for the family, they needed but to see the two men together in order to know them apart. In the agitation of the moment, I am afraid the welcome they gave brother John from the West lacked the proper warmth.

John James Alston understood that it was "up to him" to explain. And it was the cool and resourceful city-man, his dignity still touched with the heart-warm jollity of the country John James, who rose to the occasion, and somehow won all hearts to him anew in the utterance of his first few sentences.

"Mr. Damon," he said, "Asher, my brother,"—he put his hand on Asher's shoulder and kept it there,—"and all you, my dear, newfound friends, I have to ask your pardon for usurping a position that does not belong to me. I am John J. Alston of New York. I have always been a lonely man. I never married, and have no family ties. I think I never realized how lonely I was until, coming up into this section on business, I heard on every side talk of Christmas, and saw at every station Christmas meetings and greetings, and people going home. Five apartment rooms make my home," he added with a smile. "While I waited for my train at the Junction, these children claimed me as their uncle, and Sarah here saluted me as her brother." Sarah looked uncomfortable. "It was very pleasant, and in an unguarded

moment I yielded to temptation and came home with them. I didn't know there were such kind-hearted people alive. I never have had such a good time in my life. May I hope you'll all pardon me, and let me be a second Uncle John to the end of the chapter?"

Half-way through his little oration he felt Maidie's hand slip shyly into his. Billy stood close behind him; little John, who had resented being put down, tried to climb up his leg; and Dolly, with her curly-haired beauty in one arm, hung to him whenever she could get a hold. Plainly John James "filled the bill" with them.

"Huh! well! see that now! *My* nose's out of joint," said the Western Uncle John, with a laugh, indicating the children. "I never heard of a thing like this—never. It's a most astonishing thing—really, now. But I can't blame you." He offered his hand to John James. "I don't see but we'll have to get acquainted. It's a great comfort, too, to know that I resemble such a good-looking man!" He scrutinized John James closely. "It almost reconciles me to the loss of my turkey dinner."

"But you shan't lose it!" protested Aunt Sarah, amid the babel of tongues wherewith they welcomed the Western uncle afresh, and sought to assure John James of their entire forgiveness and acceptance of him as one of the family. And straightway one of the cousins dragged Uncle John away to the table, with intent to satisfy his hunger, and incidentally to lay before him a history of the whole affair.

Later on, the business of Christmas enjoyment was resumed with—if possible—greater zest than ever; and when, at a shockingly late hour, John James repaired to the mountainous bed in the little room, he knew that peace and good-will were more than mere names, and that he never should repent of the audacious performance which had won him a whole family of country relatives. And while just dropping off to sleep, it came to him that it would be well to look up those Connecticut cousins before next Christmas, and find out what they were like.

BUNNY FACE AND THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS [1]

Gertrude A. Kay

He was such a very little boy and everything about him was pale—hair, eyes, ears, everything. But even though his face was so peaked, his big ears were what you noticed first, and we soon discovered that he could move them most surprisingly—backward and forward. This was something that none of the rest of us could do. It was for this reason probably that we began calling him Bunny Face.

He didn't have a family, like other children. I don't know to this day where he came from, but he lived with a woman that he called aunt, whenever he called her anything. But she played very little part in his life, and some folks said that she wasn't his aunt at all. But our mothers said that this was being inquisitive and told us never, never to say such a thing to Bunny Face. But the grown-ups always stopped talking about it when we were around, so of course we knew there was some more which they never would tell us. Anyway, the aunt's name was Katie Duckworth, and she had it painted in big letters over her dry-goods store downtown.

[1] By special permission of Gertrude A. Kay and the "Ladies' Home Journal."

It was a tiny little store and crowded and dark inside. She was sort of blind and never could find the things that your mother sent you there to buy. There were some folks who said she wasn't very bright. But to this day, whenever I smell gingham it makes me think of Katie Duckworth and her little dry-goods store.

Although they seemed to get along all right, Bunny Face and his aunt never fixed up in their best clothes and went off together a-hold of hands, as the rest of us did with our mothers or our aunts. But then poor Bunny Face didn't have any other clothes; though, goodness knows, that didn't worry him at all. His aunt never sent him to Sunday school and didn't bother at all when the teacher told her that he played truant. But Bunny Face was good-natured; and if you had ever seen a smile start on his face and spread all over it till it made his ears wiggle, you would have smiled, too, no matter what.

"Why is a goblin, or why isn't a goblin?" He was fond of asking the rest of us questions like that, and then he would laugh and laugh, just as if he knew the answer himself. He often told us long stories about places he'd been and queer things he'd done, and though we knew that they had never really happened, we didn't care.

In school he wasn't any good at all; just sat and looked out of the window and scratched things with his jackknife. He spoiled his books and spilled ink on the floor, but he loved big dictionary words and

knew lots of them, so sometimes we didn't know just what he was talking about. He played truant oftener than any of the big boys; maybe it was because it was so easy for him to get away, being so small he could slip out before teacher noticed.

But the school house janitor—Old Crab, we called him—was always on the lookout for Bunny Face. He was really a terrible person, evil and hateful. He hobbled on one crutch and lived in a battered old shanty by the dump. You see, he didn't have a wife —dead or something; but the shanty was just full of children. They were all sizes and all starved looking—and bad too.

Bunny Face knew the woods all about as most children knew their own back lot, and he used to walk miles and miles through any kind of weather, for, as he said, things happened in the woods and there were water spirits down in the creek. He kept track of all the little animals, and he knew what trees had squirrels living in them and where certain birds had their nests. But when he told about them the creatures that lived in the woods seemed exactly like folks. Well, late one afternoon on his way home, when he'd been prowling around all day, he heard a most awful racket, then barking. And suddenly a Maltese cat flattened itself and wiggled under the fence and shot up a tree. Bunny Face looked over the fence into the garden. Yes, there was the very dog, only he was tied. Right that minute an old man came out and said "Well, well," and "What, what," the way old people do.

"Is she yours?" Bunny Face pointed up in the branches.

"No, sonny," answered the old man.

"Guess I'll get her then," said Bunny Face; and he began to coax "Nice kitty, nice kitty" till the cat came down within reach. She was a poor, thin thing with eager eyes and shabby ears. But he thought that she had a fine coat.

"Let's give her some supper," said the old man.

So that is the way it came about that Bunny Face and the Parson started being friends.

Right away they began to get acquainted there in the kitchen while the cat lapped milk, and the Parson invited Bunny Face to stay to supper. He said that he could, all right; so that was settled and they went into the other room to sit by the fire till suppertime.

"Think I'll take my cat," said Bunny Face.

"Why not call her Agnes, after my old horse?" said the Parson.

And so the Maltese cat was named Agnes.

It was nice and warm in the Parson's house, and there were lots of things to ask questions about. There were two big creaking chairs in front of the fire, and the old man sat in one and Bunny Face sat in the other and held Agnes on his lap. Finally the cat went to sleep, and they talked. Bunny Face told his new friend about a lot of things. And the Parson told about his horse that he had had once and about the dog that had barked at Agnes.

Just then a little bell rang, and the Parson said

that supper was ready. They went out and washed their hands under the pump, then sat down to the table in the kitchen, where there was an old lady. The Parson said that she was his sister and then he told her who Bunny Face was. After that the old man said a grace and they ate little biscuits with honey and different things and Bunny Face enjoyed himself very much indeed. But the old lady wasn't a bit like anyone he had ever seen before, because her face was different. And when Bunny Face started home she tied his muffler and asked if he was warm enough. He took Agnes with him and said, yes, he'd come again. And the Parson stood in the door and held the lamp up over his head till Bunny Face got 'way down the road.

The next morning there was snow on the ground, and the children at school began to talk about Christmas. And very soon all the shops fixed up their show windows with Christmas things. But Hampton's Toy Shop was the finest. Everyone thought so, and each day we were nearly late at school because we stood and looked in so long. Old Mrs. Hampton always clerked with a black satin apron on and a scoopy black hat, and she wore thick glasses to look at the price with. Though the children didn't buy, they always asked how much everything was.

One day Bunny Face followed some of the other children in, and there hanging up on the wall he saw a picture. It showed Santa Claus himself, pack and all, coming out of a little house with a bright green door and a red chimney. But there was something

about that picture that made him feel very queer. Finally he knew what it was. It was the trees. You see, he knew exactly where those big, tall pine trees were, out on Clark's road. He was sure of it. But he'd find out for himself. Anyway there wouldn't be a picture of Santa Claus' house if he really didn't have one, and why wouldn't it be out on Clark's road anyway? He kept on thinking about it all the morning.

So that afternoon he played truant again. It was a cold day, and the snowflakes nipped you on the cheeks as they flew past, but Bunny Face pulled down his cap and hurried on. He scrambled over fences and took all the short cuts across the snowy fields that led off toward Clark's road. It was a long way to go on such a cold day, but he kept saying to himself what fun it would be when he got there to knock on Santa Claus' door. Then he'd wait and Santa Claus would say "Come in"—just like that, and open would pop the door and there he, Bunny Face, would be standing. Of course he'd tell Santa Claus right away who he was, and Santa Claus would probably say, "Stay to supper, won't you?" Then he'd see all the toys that were ready for Christmas, and may be Santa Claus would say, "Help yourself, Bunny Face; pick out something nice."

Now the road curves just before you come to those tall pines, and Bunny Face decided to close his eyes and take five hundred steps, then open them quick, for there he'd be exactly in front of Santa Claus'

house. It kept him busy counting steps, and he got mixed up and maybe he cheated a little to make five hundred come sooner, but finally it was four hundred and ninety-eight, then four hundred and ninety-nine. Then he opened his eyes.

The wind was whistling through the branches and blowing the snow in cloudy rings under the tall black trees. But no little Santa Claus' house with a green door and red chimney was standing there. Bunny Face couldn't see a house anywhere. Then he knew how cold he was, and his feet didn't *feel* at all. He rubbed his eyes, for this was the place. Those were the very trees surely. Then he tried to think of all the other tall pine trees that he knew. Of course, maybe he had made a mistake; he would look at Mrs. Hampton's picture again tomorrow. There was nothing to do now but to go back across the cold, white fields. He tried not to think about eating supper with Santa Claus and choosing a present for himself.

It seemed a thousand times farther going back than it had coming; indeed he thought that he never, *never* would get there. But at last, just as the street lights were coming on, he opened the door of Katie Duckworth's store and dragged himself over to the stove.

But my, how his heart jumped! For there, stretching out and looking very long, was Agnes fast asleep under the stove. He'd somehow forgotten about Agnes today, but he pulled her out and held her tight. How soft and warm and gentle she was!

Katie Duckworth was selling red mittens to a woman who said they were for Christmas, and she bought hair ribbons and handkerchiefs and a lot more presents before she left. Bunny Face saw that his aunt had been putting Christmas trimmings around the store while he was away. It looked quite fine. But it seemed queer, too, that she'd never talked about Christmas.

It seemed to Bunny Face that every single child had money to spend—for presents for other folks, mind you. This was all new to Bunny Face, for he had supposed that Santa Claus brought all the presents to everybody.

So Bunny Face concluded that he must have some Christmas secrets too. He'd give presents to people himself and have surprises and whisper like other folks. But how about the presents—what were they to be? That puzzled him. He sat by the stove and thought and thought. The next day he went for a walk. And after a while he found himself on the last street of the town just where the fields began. Ahead were the snowy woods and the frozen creek.

"Guess I'll look for the pine trees," said Bunny Face. This had been in his head all the time, and he only said that to surprise himself. If he could only really find Santa Claus he'd be all right. Then he'd explain that all he had was Agnes, and she wasn't a Christmas present to be given away. And he knew that there was no other way out of it; he must find him. So that day he visited all the pine trees that were anywhere about. But not under one of them did

he find a house, let alone Santa Claus' house.

He knew that it must be getting late, for the sun was big and red and low down behind things. He was coming to the dump, which was mostly covered with snow, but the janitor's shanty looked black and gloomy and only a little thin blue smoke was coming out of the chimney.

Suddenly a snowball whizzed past his head, and he saw the biggest dump child duck behind the corner; then snowballs began coming from every way, for the other dump children had come out. After a while they got tired and began to talk. Bunny Face started it by asking if they knew where Santa Claus' house was. The real little dump children stared, but the big ones looked ugly.

"Santy Claus your granny!" they said. "Who put that in your head? Anyway if there was one, our old man would take his shotgun to him."

As Bunny Face trudged on, it came to him that there would be other folks beside himself who would not get presents on Christmas. It made him feel a little better to count them.

"First," he said, "there's me; second, Agnes; next, the dump children. Let's see—fourth, the janitor, of course. And fifth?" He might as well use up all his fingers. "Fifth—Madam Iceberg. Yes, that was a good one, for she wouldn't get presents or give them."

But you don't know who Madam Iceberg was. She was the most-wondered-about person anywhere around. Long ago she used to go traveling, and

have visitors from away off come to see her. At those times the big house would be lighted from top to bottom, with all sorts of things going on. Then she was really beautiful to look at. But mercy me, how she'd gone off these last years! Now her hair was far too yellow and her cheeks far too pink and her eyes were—uneasy.

There were No Trespassing signs all over her place; and rather than buy at any of our stores, she used to drive every day in her high carriage over to the next town and do all of her shopping there. So you can see that she wasn't at all friendly with any of us thereabout.

Of course little Bunny Face had never talked to her, but he felt sure Santa Claus wouldn't risk bothering much around her chimneys.

So with his head filled with these thoughts he went on till he came to the Parson's little white house. Bunny Face decided to knock on the door and ask how the dog was. And the door was quickly opened by the Parson himself, who invited him right in.

And the Parson's sister got him some supper, and he sat on a little stool by the fire and ate it while he told them about hunting for Santa Claus' house. Then Bunny Face said that he knew five folks that wouldn't have any Christmas, yes, sir. "Me," he said, "Agnes, the dump children, the janitor, and Madam Iceberg."

"Well, maybe not," said the Parson.

Then he talked about something else, and asked

Bunny Face if he had ever heard the Christmas Story. As Bunny Face didn't know that there was one, he shook his head. So the Parson opened a book and turned pages, then read: " 'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.' "

When it was finished the Parson closed the book, saying: "It's the Spirit of Christmas, sonny—the Spirit of Christmas that the world needs."

Bunny Face liked the idea. Spirits were a sort of ghosts or goblins; he knew that much. Not like Santa Claus at all—fat and pink, but different. He'd rather think that the Spirit was like a beautiful lady, a sort of fairy. So that's what he was thinking about one day coming home from school, when he heard the sound of sleigh bells behind him. He turned around and waited, for hopping bobs in those days was a great sport with the children. But it wasn't a bobsled at all, but Madam Iceberg's fine green sleigh, fur rugs and all.

"Who's afraid?" said Bunny Face to himself as the sleigh glided past him, and he hopped lightly on behind, to the surprise of all the people in the street.

On they went, Bunny Face, holding on for dear life, and Madam Iceberg in all her furs sitting there as grim as an image. They went very fast and soon all the shops were left behind, and the houses, and they started to climb the hill toward the big gate.

Then something made her look around suddenly and their eyes met. "Well," she said, surprised, "who are you?"

"Bunny Face," he answered promptly.

For a minute she looked as if she might laugh; but she didn't. Then she said, "Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," said Bunny Face; "they all call you Madam Iceberg."

"Possibly," was all she said.

Bunny Face was about to let go when she turned around again and said, "Now hold on tight." They were turning in through the big iron gates which stood open.

Then the sleigh stopped in front of the house, and Madam Iceberg handed Bunny Face one of her bundles to carry, saying, "Here, boy, take this." The driver looked surprised, and so did the maid who opened the door; but nobody said a word—just followed her inside.

It was big and dark and quiet in the house. Then suddenly Bunny Face saw something that made him stop short and drop the bundle.

"*There's* the Spirit of Christmas," he shouted as loud as he could shout.

"Where—what?" asked the lady, ever so surprised.

"There on the wall," cried Bunny Face, running quickly past the amazed group and stopping in front of the portrait of a beautiful person in white with flowers in her hair.

"You silly boy!" said Madam Iceberg. "That's only my portrait—when I was married."

"Oh, it's not you," said Bunny Face, giving her a

long look and shaking his head. "It's the Spirit of Christmas. I've found her, I've found her!" he cried, jumping about and clapping his hands.

"I don't know what you're talking about at all, Mr. Bunny Face, but come over here and sit down, and we'll hear all about it."

"Well, there's lots about it," said Bunny Face; "and you're in it, too, for you aren't going to have any Christmas—you, and the school janitor, and the dump children, and Agnes, and me—none of us are going to get presents."

Then Bunny Face told her about Agnes, and the Parson, and the dump children who didn't believe in Santa Claus or anything. "That's about all," he said, "except Santa Claus' house, and I couldn't find that."

So Bunny Face stood up and said he must go, and when he looked back Madam Iceberg had sunk down deep in her chair, so that he could hardly see her. But the Spirit of Christmas on the wall looked like a white angel.

Something exciting and most surprising happened the next day. The school janitor, Old Crab, was in jail. Yes, sir; and the big boys were down there trying to see him through the bars. He had been caught in Madam Iceberg's house the night before, stealing. The servants found him as he was getting away with a big roast under his arm.

Everybody was wondering what she would do about it. Would she have him let off maybe, because it was so near Christmas? But nobody really ex-

pected her to do that. And just then the Parson came walking along with his sister, and this one and that one told him that he was the very person to go up and talk to the madam about letting the janitor go. It was his duty. But he shook his head and said that "it wouldn't do a bit of good, not a bit!" But his sister said, "Oh, Archibald, do!" So he went, the poor man.

When he rang the bell he told himself that he was a fool for coming; but the door opened just then, so he couldn't run; and the maid was saying, "Come in, please." And after a while Madam Iceberg came walking in.

"Oh, you've come to talk about little Bunny Face, I know," she said, smiling and holding out her hand. "He has the most fantastic ideas," she said, "and he calls my portrait in the hall the Spirit of Christmas, though I can't see why."

You can guess how surprised the Parson was; but he asked to see the picture, and said he quite agreed with Bunny Face. And Madam Iceberg looked pleased. Then they talked on and on, but not a word was said about the janitor until the Parson was about to leave. Then he told her. But he didn't seem at all astonished when she said to let him go—by all means. Yes, certainly, considering the season and all that sort of thing.

A few minutes later the Reverend Mr. Brisbane was seen walking out through the big gates quite smartly and smiling most pleasantly.

Then one day Madam Iceberg's big green sleigh

stopped right in front of Katie Duckworth's store, which was the first time that that had ever happened. And she got out herself and walked in. All the customers in the store turned around and stared.

"Ah, here you are, Mr. Bunny Face. I've been looking for you everywhere. I want you to help me—that is, I want you to join me in some secrets and surprises."

Just then Katie Duckworth came over to see what was wanted, and Madam Iceberg explained very politely that she would like to borrow her nephew for a little while to help with some Christmas plans.

Katie Duckworth said, "All right, ma'am."

So Bunny Face got his cap and muffler and followed Madam Iceberg out to the big green sleigh. Then she told the driver to drive around a bit, because she and the young man must have a talk.

"Now, Mr. Bunny Face, please begin and name over that list of folks who won't have any Christmas this year," said the lady.

"Well," said Bunny Face, "there's me, of course, and Agnes, then the dump children, and the janitor and—and you."

"All right," said Madam Iceberg; "and I want you to help me make plans. Will you?"

"Sure," chirped Bunny Face. "Toys?"

"Yes, indeed, toys," she said. "But where do we get them?"

"Why, old Mrs. Hampton's Toy Shop, of course," said Bunny Face.

So the lady bent forward and said, "Mrs. Hampton's Toy Shop, driver."

When old Mrs. Hampton saw them and knew who it was, she took off her thick glasses, then put them back on again quickly. But she didn't say "Run along," today, but "What can I do for you?"

And before Madam Iceberg could answer Mrs. Hampton, Bunny Face grabbed her skirt and, pulling her along, pointed to a picture of Santa Claus coming out of a funny little house under some tall pine trees.

"That's it," he said; "Santa Claus' house."

"So it is," said Madam Iceberg; "Sure enough; that's the house that you were hunting, isn't it?"

But Bunny Face didn't answer. He had his head on one side and was staring with all his eyes.

The lady puckered her lips and pointed and sort of blinked; so old Mrs. Hampton wrote in her order book: "1 framed picture, entitled The House of Santa Claus."

"Now," said Madam Iceberg in a business-like tone, "let's begin to buy toys."

"Who for?" asked Bunny Face.

"For your dump children," answered Madam Iceberg.

So Bunny Face began. "That and that and that," he said, pointing at fire engines and kites and hobby-horses. And they bought dolls and dishes and sewing baskets for girls.

Then Madam Iceberg paid for the things out of

her purse, and told Mrs. Hampton to send them up to her house, and said "Good-day."

The other customers looked too surprised to speak when the lady and the little boy closed the door behind them.

When they were back in the sleigh and all covered up, she said, "Now how about Agnes' present?"

"She hasn't any place to sleep," said Bunny Face, "but under the stove."

"All right," said Madam Iceberg; "then probably a basket with a red cushion in it would please her; don't you think it might?"

Yes, Bunny Face thought that it might.

So the lady said that she would make the red cushion herself; then she told the driver to go to the hardware store, and they went in and she bought several baskets.

"But," said Bunny Face, "Agnes only needs one."

"I'm thinking of the janitor and some others on your list," said Madam Iceberg.

"Are we going to give him a present?" asked Bunny Face.

"Certainly," said Madam Iceberg, "for he's on your list." So at the next store she bought good things to fill baskets. Bunny Face thought she'd never stop.

"And now," she said, "we're finished."

"There are two more names yet," said Bunny Face.

"What?" said Madam Iceberg, with the twinkle look. "Two more?"

"Sure," said Bunny Face. "Yours and mine."

"Oh, that is so," she said; "but I'll have to talk to Santa Claus about your present, so that you'll be surprised. That's one of my secrets, you know."

Of course that sounded pretty pleasant to Bunny Face—talking to Santa Claus about secrets and surprises. But something worried him at the same time: What was Madam Iceberg to get? And he grew so quiet that finally she bent over and looked at him.

"I don't know what you are going to get for Christmas," said Bunny Face slowly.

"Well, I know what I want," said the lady gayly.

"Oh, what?" asked Bunny Face, sitting up straight.

"Why, a little guest on Christmas day," she answered.

"A little what?" asked Bunny Face, for that wasn't a present at all.

"Yes, a little guest, one Mr. Bunny Face, to come early on Christmas morning and stay all day. And to go around with me and help with all the secrets and surprises."

When Bunny Face got out of the sleigh in front of Katie Duckworth's store he not only felt that he had found Santa Claus' house on Clark's road, but that he had been talking with the Spirit of Christmas as well. But it was true, all of it, and the driver

was to come for him early on Christmas morning; and Agnes could go too.

Now, Bunny Face had never had a secret before in his whole life, and he found that keeping one was not as easy as he had expected. But he did enjoy sing-songing to the rest of us children "I have a secret I won't tell," as we all walked to school. But nobody really believed it, for who could have a secret with Katie Duckworth?

As you might know, Bunny Face was up pretty early on Christmas morning, all ready, holding Agnes and watching out the front window. You could hear sleigh bells everywhere and people's voices calling, "Same to you," and "Merry Christmas."

Then came a sleigh, around the corner, and stopped in front of Katie Duckworth's store. The driver jumped out and ran in with a basket with red ribbons flying and a letter tied to the handle. The letter said "A happy Christmas to Miss Duckworth," and please to allow her nephew to come and spend the day.

Katie untied the ribbons and looked inside, and there were oranges and nuts that they could see; and so she said "All right" to Bunny Face, who picked up Agnes and said good-by. As they went through the gate, Bunny Face saw wreaths in all the windows and over the big door, and Madam Iceberg was standing there, waving her hand.

"Merry Christmas, Merry Christmas!" she said.

And then it really began. First there were all the

wreaths, and pine branches over the fireplace, and candles, and right under the Spirit of Christmas there was a trimmed Christmas tree. My, my, such a tree! You never saw the like. But under the tree—toys, toys! toys! Beginning with a velocipede—there was a sled, games, books, skates, a dark lantern. Oh, goodness me! I can't tell you all the things that there were. And if you'll believe it, there was the picture of Santa Claus' house—the very one!

For a minute Bunny Face just couldn't talk; then he jumped up and down and ran back and forth, pulling Madam Iceberg around by the hand, showing her this one and that one, and how it worked. My, how they laughed at everything. "For Miss Agnes from Bunny Face and Madam Iceberg" was what it said on the letter tied to one Christmas present. And beside the basket and the red cushion was a ball for her to play with. Bunny Face put her in and held her down with both hands till she went to sleep.

"And now, Mr. Bunny Face," said the lady, "we must go and take care of those other surprises."

"To the dump?" asked Bunny Face.

"Yes, and on the way back we'll stop at your Parson's," said Madam Iceberg.

Well, right then the sleigh came jingling around the house and stopped at the door, and what do you suppose? Well, all those toys from Mrs. Hampton's Toy Shop were packed in that sleigh, which made it look exactly like Santa Claus'. It was a strange sight, that sleigh full of toys stopping in front of the janitor's shanty. The dump children heard the

bells and came tumbling out pellmell to see what there was to see.

"Merry Christmas, everybody!" said Madam Iceberg, beginning to hand them toys. Then came the big basket with the Christmas dinner for the janitor and all the children.

"Next to the Parson's; then home again, Mr. Bunny Face, and you will please hand him this?" said Madam Iceberg as she put a letter into his pocket.

But the Parson and his sister heard the sleigh bells coming, and the door was open before they got there, and everyone was saying "Merry Christmas!" and "The same to you!" as fast and loud as he could.

Then Bunny Face said to the Parson, taking out the letter, "I am to hand you this."

And the Parson took it and read, "With every good wish from your friends, Bunny Face and Madam Iceberg." And he seemed greatly pleased, and said: "Well, I guess we all know something about the Spirit of Christmas now."

"It's her, it's her," shouted Bunny Face, pointing at Madam Iceberg, and he flew over and shook her by the coat, saying, "Now I know what those words mean."

And she looked very happy as they started toward home.

"Fe, fi, fo, fum! I smell a turkey," said the lady as the door was opened, and they went into the hall. "Let's be quick."

So taking off their things—and a-hold of hands—they went out where a table was set with two chairs, one for Bunny Face and one for her. And in the center there were red candles burning, and a Santa Claus with a pack on his back. Then they sat down and Madam Iceberg leaned over and said, "Merry Christmas, *Sunny* Face—for that is what I am going to call you."

And he said, "Same to you!" and a big smile started and ran clear across his face and both ears wiggled pleasantly.

Then the dinner began to come in. First a turkey on a big platter, all trimmed up and so brown and shiny that it looked varnished. Next were all sorts of dishes of different things with covers over them to keep them hot, and you couldn't begin to guess what was in them all. "A little more gravy over everything" or "Do have another drumstick," Madam Iceberg would say.

Then finally they both leaned back in their chairs and didn't eat any more. They talked about all sorts of things and asked each other questions, back and forth—and he asked her if she knew any stories!

She said: "You're right I do, Mr. Sunny Face. Come, let's go in by the fire and tell them there."

So they took hold of hands and went.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE[1]

Mary Austin

EASTWARD from the Sierras rises a strong red hill known as Pine Mountain, though the Indians call it The Hill of Summer Snow. At its foot stands a town of a hundred board houses, given over wholly to the business of mining. The noise of it goes on by day and night,—the creak of the windlasses, the growl of the stamps in the mill, the clank of the cars running down to the dump, and from the open doors of the drinking saloons, great gusts of laughter and the sound of singing. Billows of smoke roll up from the tall stacks and by night are lit ruddily by the smelter fires all going at a roaring blast.

Whenever the charcoal-burner's son looked down on the red smoke, the glare, and the hot breath of the furnaces, it seemed to him like an exhalation from the wickedness that went on continually in the town; though all he knew of wickedness was the word, a rumor from passers-by, and a kind of childish fear. The charcoal-burner's cabin stood on a spur of Pine Mountain two thousand feet above the town, and sometimes the boy went down to it on the back of the laden burros when his father carried

[1] Reprinted from "The Basket Woman" by permission of and by arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Co., publishers.

charcoal to the furnaces. All else that he knew were the wild creatures of the mountain, the trees, the storms, the small flowering things, and away at the back of his heart a pale memory of his mother like the faint forest odor that clung to the black embers of the pine. They had lived in the town when the mother was alive and the father worked in the mines. There were not many women or children in the town at that time, but mining men jostling with rude quick ways; and the young mother was not happy.

"Never let my boy grow up in such a place," she said as she lay dying; and when they had buried her in the coarse shallow soil, her husband looked for comfort up toward The Hill of Summer Snow shining purely, clear white and quiet in the sun. It swam in the upper air above the sooty rock of the town and seemed as if it called. Then he took the young child up to the mountain, built a cabin under the tamarack pines, and a pit for burning charcoal for the furnace fires.

No one could wish for a better place for a boy to grow up in than the slope of Pine Mountain. There was the drip of pine balm and a wind like wine, white water in the springs, and as much room for roaming as one desired. The charcoal-burner's son chose to go far, coming back with sheaves of strange bloom from the edge of snow banks on the high ridges, bright spar or peacock-painted ores, hatfuls of berries, or strings of shining trout. He played away whole mornings in glacier meadows where he

heard the eagle scream; walking sometimes in a mist of cloud he came upon deer feeding, or waked them from their lair in the deep fern. On snow-shoes in winter he went over the deep drifts and spied among the pine tops on the sparrows, the grouse, and the chilly robins wintering under the green tents. The deep snow lifted him up and held him among the second stories of the trees. But that was not until he was a great lad, straight and springy as a young fir. As a little fellow he spent his days at the end of a long rope staked to a pine just out of reach of the choppers and the charcoal-pits. When he was able to go about alone, his father made him give three promises: never to follow a bear's trail nor meddle with the cubs, never to try to climb the eagle rocks after the young eagles, never to lie down nor to sleep on the sunny, south slope where the rattlesnakes frequented. After that he was free of the whole wood.

When Mathew, for so the boy was called, was ten years old, he began to be of use about the charcoal pits, to mark the trees for cutting, to sack the coals, to keep the house, and cook his father's meals. He had no companions of his own age nor wanted any, for at this time he loved the silver firs. A group of them grew in a swale below the cabin, tall and fine; the earth under them was slippery and brown with needles. Where they stood close together with overlapping boughs the light among the tops was golden green, but between the naked boles it was a vapor thin and blue. These were the old trees that had

wagged their tops together for three hundred years. Around them stood a ring of saplings and seedlings scattered there by the parent firs, and a little apart from these was the one that Mathew loved. It was slender of trunk and silvery white, the branches spread out fanwise to the outline of a perfect spire. In the spring, when the young growth covered it as with a gossamer web, it gave out a pleasant odor, and it was to him like the memory of what his mother had been. Then he garlanded it with flowers and hung streamers of white clematis all heavy with bloom upon its boughs. He brought it berries in cups of bark and sweet water from the spring; always as long as he knew it, it seemed to him that the fir tree had a soul.

The first trip he had ever made on snow-shoes was to see how it fared among the drifts. That was always a great day when he could find the slender cross of its topmost bough above the snow. The fir was not very tall in those days, but the snows as far down on the slope as the charcoal-burner's cabin lay shallowly. There was a time when Mathew expected to be as tall as the fir, but after a while the boy did not grow so fast and the fir kept on adding its whorl of young branches every year.

Mathew told it all his thoughts. When at times there was a heaviness in his breast which was really a longing for his mother, though he did not understand it, he would part the low spreading branches and creep up to the slender trunk of the fir. Then he would put his arms around it and be quiet for a

long beautiful time. The tree had its own way of comforting him; the branches swept the ground and shut him in dark and close. He made a little cairn of stones under it and kept his treasures there.

Often as he lay snuggled up to the heart of the tree, the boy would slip his hand over the smooth intervals between the whorls of boughs, and wonder how they knew the way to grow. All the fir trees are alike in this, that they throw out their branches from the main stem like the rays of a star, one added to another with the season's growth. They stand out stiffly from the trunk, and the shape of each new bough in the beginning and the shape of the last growing twig when they have spread out broadly with many branchlets, bending with the weight of their own needles, is the shape of a cross; and the topmost sprig that rises above all the star-built whorls is a long and slender cross, until by the springing of new branches it becomes a star. So the two forms go on running into and repeating each other, and each star is like all the stars, and every bough is another's twin. It is this trim and certain growth that sets out the fir from all the mountain trees, and gives to the young saplings a secret look as they stand straight and stiffly among the wild brambles on the hill. For the wood delights to grow abroad at all points, and one might search a summer long without finding two leaves of the oak alike, or any two trumpets of the spangled mimulus. So, as at that time he had nothing better worth studying about, Mathew noticed and pondered the secret of

the silver fir, and grew up with it until he was twelve years old and tall and strong for his age. By this time the charcoal-burner began to be troubled about the boy's schooling.

Meantime there was rioting and noise and coming and going of strangers in the town at the foot of Pine Mountain, and the furnace blast went on ruddily and smokily. Because of the things he heard Mathew was afraid, and on rare occasions when he went down to it he sat quietly among the charcoal sacks, and would not go far away from them except when he held his father by the hand. After a time it seemed life went more quietly there, flowers began to grow in the yards of the houses, and they met children walking in the streets with books upon their arms.

"Where are they going, father?" said the boy.

"To school," said the charcoal-burner.

"And may I go?" asked Mathew.

"Not yet, my son."

But one day his father pointed out the foundations of a new building going up in the town.

"It is a church," he said, "and when that is finished it will be a sign that there will be women here like your mother, and then you may go to school."

Mathew ran and told the fir tree all about it.

"But I will never forget you, never," he cried, and he kissed the trunk. Day by day, from the spur of the mountain, he watched the church building, and it was wonderful how much he could see in that clear, thin atmosphere; no other building in town

interested him so much. He saw the walls go up and the roof, and the spire rise skyward with something that glittered twinkling on its top. Then they painted the church white and hung a bell in the tower. Mathew fancied he could hear it of Sundays as he saw the people moving along like specks in the streets.

"Next week," said the father, "the school begins, and it is time for you to go as I promised. I will come to see you once a month, and when the term is over you shall come back to the mountain." Mathew said goodby to the fir tree, and there were tears in his eyes though he was happy. "I shall think of you very often," he said, "and wonder how you are getting along. When I come back I will tell you everything that happens. I will go to church, and I am sure I shall like that. It has a cross on top like yours, only it is yellow and shines. Perhaps when I am gone I shall learn why you carry a cross, also." Then he went a little timidly, holding fast by his father's hand.

There were so many people in the town that it was quite as strange and fearful to him as it would be to you who had grown up in town to be left alone in the wood. At night, when he saw the charcoal-burner's fires glowing up in the air where the bulk of the mountain melted into the dark, he would cry a little under the blankets, but after he began to learn, there was no more occasion for crying. It was to the child as though there had been a candle lighted in a dark room. On Sunday he went to the church, and

then it was both light and music, for he heard the minister read about God in the great book and believed it all, for everything that happens in the woods is true, and people who grow up in it are best at believing. Mathew thought it was all as the minister said, that there is nothing better than pleasing God. Then when he lay awake at night he would try to think how it would have been with him if he had never come to this place. In his heart he began to be afraid of the time when he would have to go back to the mountain, where there was no one to tell him about this most important thing in the world, for his father never talked to him of these things. It preyed upon his mind, but if any one noticed it, they thought that he pined for his father and wished himself at home.

It drew toward midwinter, and the white cap of The Hill of Summer Snow, which never quite melted even in the warmest weather, began to spread downward until it reached the charcoal-burner's home. There was a great stir and excitement among the children, for it had been decided to have a Christmas tree in the church. Every Sunday now the Christ-child story was told over and grew near and brighter like the Christmas star. Mathew had not known about it before, except that on a certain day in the year his father had bought him toys. He had supposed that it was because it was stormy and he had to be indoors. Now he was wrapped up in the story of love and sacrifice, and felt his heart grow larger as he breathed it in, looking upon clear wind-

less nights to see if he might discern the Star of Bethlehem rising over Pine Mountain and the Christ-child come walking on the snow. It was not that he really expected it, but that the story was so alive in him. It is easy for those who had lived long in the high mountains to believe in beautiful things. Mathew wished in his heart that he might never go away from this place. He sat in his seat in church, and all that the minister said sank deeply into his mind.

When it came time to decide about the tree, because Mathew's father was a charcoal-burner and knew where the best trees grew, it was quite natural to ask him to furnish the tree for his part. Mathew fairly glowed with delight, and his father was pleased, too, for he liked to have his son noticed. The Saturday before Christmas, which fell on Tuesday that year, was the time set for going for the tree, and by that time Mathew had quite settled in his mind that it should be his silver fir. He did not know how otherwise he could bring the tree to share in his new delight, nor what else he had worth giving, for he quite believed what he had been told, that it is only through giving the best beloved that one comes to the heart's desire. With all his heart Mathew wished never to live in any place where he might not hear about God. So when his father was ready with the ropes and the sharpened axe, the boy led the way to the silver firs.

"Why, that is a little beauty," said the charcoal-burner, "and just the right size."

They were obliged to shovel away the snow to get at it for cutting, and Mathew turned away his face when the chips began to fly. The tree fell upon its side with a shuddering sigh; little beads of clear resin stood out about the scar of the axe. It seemed as if the tree wept. But how graceful and trim it looked when it stood in the church waiting for gifts! Mathew hoped that it would understand.

The charcoal-burner came to church on Christmas eve, the first time in many years. It makes a difference about these things when you have a son to take part in them. The church and the tree were alight with candles; to the boy it seemed like what he supposed the place of dreams might be. One large candle burned on the top of the tree and threw out pointed rays like a star; it made the charcoal-burner's son think of Bethlehem. Then he heard the minister talking, and it was all of a cross and a star; but Mathew could only look at the tree, for he saw that it trembled, and he felt that he had betrayed it. Then the choir began to sing, and the candle on the top of the tree burned down quite low, and Mathew saw the slender cross of the topmost bough stand up dark before it. Suddenly he remembered his old puzzle about it, how the smallest twigs were divided off in each in the shape of a cross, how the boughs repeated the star form every year, and what was true of his fir was true of them all. Then it must have been that there were tears in his eyes, for he could not see plainly: the pillars of the church spread up-

ward like the shafts of the trees, and the organ playing was like the sound of the wind in their branches, and the stately star-built firs rose up like spires, taller than the church tower, each with a cross on top. The sapling which was still before him trembled more, moving its boughs as if it spoke; and the boy heard it in his heart and believed, for it spoke to him of God. Then all the fear went out of his heart and he had no more dread of going back to the mountain to spend his days, for now he knew that he need never be away from the green reminder of hope and sacrifice in the star and the cross of the silver fir; and the thought broadened in his mind that he might find more in the forest than he had ever thought to find, now that he knew what to look for, since everything speaks of God in its own way and it is only a matter of understanding how.

It was very gay in the little church that Christmas night, with laughter and bonbons flying about, and every child had a package of candy and an armful of gifts. The charcoal-burner had his pockets bulging full of toys, and Mathew's eyes glowed like the banked fires of the charcoal-pits as they walked home in the keen, windless night.

"Well, my boy," said the charcoal-burner, "I am afraid you will not be wanting to go back to the mountain with me after this."

"Oh, yes, I will," said Mathew happily, "for I think the mountains know quite as much of the important things as they know here in the town."

"Right you are," said the charcoal-burner, as he clapped his boy's hand between both his own, "and I am pleased to think you have turned out such a sensible little fellow." But he really did not know all that was in his son's heart.

CHRISTMAS LUCK[1]

Albert Bigelow Paine

"Oh, Eb, it runs! It really does!"

Nell, who was twelve—a slender, sunny-haired little creature—first clasped her hands, then clapped them, then danced up and down the old woodshed pausing at last in front of a big kitchen table, where a toy engine and train of cars were making a circuit around and around and around a tiny track. The hired boy, Eb—a few years older, rough-handed and poorly dressed—smiled at the child's pleasure.

"That's nothing," he said. "I didn't have to do much to it."

"But you did, Eb. It was all broken to pieces. Papa would be awfully disappointed to find it that way when he comes, and Tommy would never have gotten over it. Never! He's set his heart on a train for Christmas, and it's been promised to him, and now to have it all smashed in the express! Oh, Eb, nobody could have fixed it but you. You're a real genius, mamma says, and ought to go to a mechanical school. Isn't it lucky you're living with Uncle Bob when we come to visit him!"

[1] By permission of the author and Harper and Brothers.

The dainty, dancing fairy stopped suddenly and held up a warning finger.

"Sh, Eb! There's Tommy now! He's coming back! Oh, stop it! stop it! and cover it so he can't see! He'll be coming straight in here, I know!"

Outside there were the wild whoop of a small boy with large lungs, a clatter of a sled, a stamping of feet, then a plunging into the kitchen, just as Eb had slipped a stick through the train wheels to stop it, and covered it with an old homespun saddle blanket, gathered hastily from the corner. A moment later Tommy burst in, red, snowy, and full of the curiosity which most healthy boys are likely to have, especially about Christmas-time.

"What are you doing here, Nell, you and Eb? What have you been making with all that wire, and those tools? What's that blanket on the table? Pooh, Bess! What are you shivering for with that great cape on? I'm not cold, and I've been coasting for over an hour, down the back-barn hill! Oh, say, come in the kitchen, Nell! I want to show you a funny icicle I found. Come quick, before it's all melted away!"

Like a whirlwind he had stormed in and out, followed closely by Nell, who threw a merry glance of relief over her shoulder. Eb, leaning against the work-bench, smiled back; then, with a sigh, saw them disappear.

For Nellie's words and her mother's had set his heart to beating with something like hope. What if

there really could be a way by which he could go to such a place as she had mentioned, and learn to be a—a— And then, as he saw them go out, and the door close behind them, it seemed as if hope went out with them. They would all be gone in a few days and never remember him again. He hurried off to pitch down the evening hay for the cattle, and see if he couldn't forget, too.

From earliest childhood Eben Lessing had worked with tools—a one-bladed knife at first, then such other clumsy things as he could get hold of. With these he had made curious toys that would run by water, or wind, or heat, or steam, some of them quite useful. When he came to Robert Whittaker's to live he built, besides other things, a churn of a new pattern, and a fan over the dining-room table, both to run by water-power brought from the brook. And when Mrs. William Whittaker, who was from the city, had seen these things, she had said the boy deserved a mechanical education, and then forgot all about it again, being very busy with all the Christmas preparations, while Eb, pitching down great wads of sweet hay from the barn loft, was still dreaming in spite of himself, of a day when he should leave the district school for a mechanical college, and become a great inventor, and marry Nellie Whittaker, and so live happy ever after. Then it came milking-time, and swishing the broad white streams into the foaming pail, he dreamed again, and kept on dreaming even after he was in bed and

asleep. Then he forgot, and when he remembered again it was morning—the morning of the day before Christmas.

What a busy day that was! Of course, quite early, Eb had to drive in for papa, who was coming on the first train, and Nellie and Tom had to go along in the surrey. Then, when papa came, there was so much to tell, only, of course, Nell couldn't tell how Tommy's train had been broken and fixed, because Tommy wasn't to know anything about the train until he saw it travelling around and around on the little track that was to go clear around under the Christmas tree. Then, at home, there were all the places to see—all the places that papa had seen as a little boy: the hill where he used to slide, the same back-barn hill where Tommy had been coasting, the brook where he used to fish, the hay-mow, and the horses and cows, and the hens' nests where Nell and Tommy had found eggs, and where Tommy had been whipped by an old hen that wanted to sit; though why she should want to sit there all day in the cold on two nubbins of corn and a lump of frozen dirt that somebody had thrown at her, Tommy said he, for one, couldn't see.

Papa laughed, and said that maybe if she sat there until spring on the nubbins and frozen dirt she'd hatch out a corn-field. Then they went into the kitchen, where mamma and Aunt Maria—a big motherly woman who had never had any children of her own, except one little boy named Willie, and that died—were baking and stirring, and opening

and closing oven doors, so that people had better keep out of the way. Only you couldn't, because it smelt so nice in there of mince-meat, and of baking-cakes that came out all brown, with buttered paper sticking to them when they were turned out of the pans. Then, all at once, they found that Aunt Maria had turned out a little brown cake, from a little pan, and she cut it hot, and Tommy had a piece, and Nellie and papa, just as he used to have the day before Christmas, when he was a little boy. And after this they went into the dining-room and saw Eb's patent fan, and into the pantry to look at Eb's churn, and papa said, "Well, well!" and that somebody ought to give a boy like that a chance.

But they forgot all about it when they got to the parlor and looked at the funny album that had pictures of papa and Uncle Bob, taken together, when papa was a very little boy and Uncle Bob was his big brother. And when Uncle Bob came in they talked about the day they had it taken, more than thirty years ago, and how papa had rolled up his eyes and didn't keep still, and all that happened afterwards—the things that people always talk about when they forget for a little while that they are grown up, and only remember that they were once boys and girls, like the rest of us.

And in the afternoon they had to go and cut and bring in the Christmas tree. Tom and Mollie had already picked out a bushy little spruce up on the mountain-side, and Eb went along, because Eb had been with them and knew the way. Besides, Eb could

cut better with a hatchet than anybody, so Tommy said.

Then Tommy walked down the hill with his papa, talking all the time, while Eb and Nellie, side by side, dragged the little spruce over the snow, and Nellie talked and Eb listened, and was never so happy before in all his life, and never so sad, either, because next week it would all be over, and he would be there alone, with no school except the district school, where he had learned about all he could, and with no chance of becoming a great inventor, and doing all the things that he had dreamed.

Of course Eb had to help to trim the tree. He had never trimmed one before, but he was the handiest of them all, and could go up a step-ladder and fasten tapers to the high limbs, and string popcorn and tinsel just in the very places where it ought to be. Then, when that part of it was all done, and it was getting towards evening—that wonderful evening of hush and mystery and joy—Christmas eve—it was Nellie who said that Eb must be Santa Claus, and put the presents on the tree.

"If we put them on, ourselves, then everybody will see just what they are to have, and who gives it," she said. "If Eb puts them on, nobody will know until Christmas morning. We'll darken the sitting-room, and each one can go in and put down his things, and come right out again. Then, after supper, Eb can go in and unwrap them, and put them on the tree. Of course, Tommy, the real Santa Claus, will come afterwards, and put on his things, too."

Nellie did not mention that she had a bright new tie for Eb. She knew there would be a chance to put that on, herself, in the morning.

Everybody said Nellie's plan was a good one; so by-and-by Eb found himself in the sitting-room alone, with a great many whispered instructions, and the beautiful tree, and packages and packages of things to be unwrapped and arranged in and about it. Tommy and Nell were tiptoeing and whispering about the hall, and Nellie called to Eb to lock the door or Tommy would just *have* to come inside. So Eb locked it, laughing, and wished in his soul that Nellie at least might come in to help him. Then he noticed that somebody had put a lot of loose cotton around the foot of the tree to represent snow, and he looked from this to the little candles on the slender limbs, and shook his head, and said something about fire and tow being pretty close together. By-and-by he went out to the kitchen to wash his hands. When he came in he stopped a moment to arrange something in the corner, before going on with his work. The house was quite still now, but it was after midnight before Eb was ready to go to his bed.

It had been a wonderful evening for him. He had unwrapped and seen at close range all the pretty things that well-to-do people give one another at Christmas-time; books, games, pictures, ornaments, articles of dress, confections, and even gems. He had arranged and rearranged, and with a natural eye for the beautiful had placed the things as showily as

most people could have done, and with great thought of their safety. When he was through at last he stood back to admire his work. Then all at once he remembered that Tommy's train was still hidden in the wood-shed. He had forgotten it entirely.

He brought in the engine and cars, and then the track, in sections, and soon had it all arranged under the tree, so that it would travel around and around, though he had to move some books and other things to do it. Then he tried the train a little, to see that it would run as well as ever. He hated to leave it all; but he blew out the lamp at last and went to bed, wondering if by any chance he would oversleep next morning, and so fail to light up, and have everything in order when Tom and Nellie and the others were ready to come down.

"Whoop! Merry Christmas!"

Eb sat straight up in bed. He had overslept, then, after all. No; for it was still dark. He did not believe it could be five o'clock.

"Merry Christmas, Eb! Say, get up and light the tree! I want to see my things."

It was Tommy, of course, and the whole house would be roused and ready to come down presently. Eb leaped into his clothes, made a hasty toilet, and slipped down the back stairs, leaving Tommy still shouting Merry Christmas through the halls to arouse older people from their slumbers.

Within a few minutes everybody had concluded that it was no use to hold out against Tommy, and

in five minutes more everybody had dragged on something that resembled clothes and a pleasant smile, and came straggling down the stairs, calling greetings to one another. Tommy, at the head, was already pounding at the sitting-room door, while Eb, inside, was lighting the last tapers, and putting on a few finishing-touches, such as starting and setting a new clock for Aunt Maria, and winding up Tommy's train. Then, when he heard them all outside, he unlocked the door, and, stepping back, pulled it wide, so that all might get a sudden and full view of the beautiful Christmas tree.

For a moment they stood quite still, blinking from the brightness of it. Then there came a chorus of "Oh! oh!" "Well! well!" and, "How beautiful!" with another wild whoop from Tommy, ending up with, "Oh, gee! see my train!"

A second later he had bounded forward toward the precious train, and was ducking down under the tree for a closer view.

"Tommy!" "Oh, Tom!" "Thomas! Look out. The candles!"

There was a regular chorus of warnings,—but all too late. A second later a taper that had been fixed to a branch, struck by Tommy's head, had fallen, and the loose cotton about the tree was afire, the blaze darting up into the branches.

Tommy rolled out from under the tree like an armadillo. Nellie clasped her hands and shut her eyes to keep out the terrible sight and began to moan

and wail. Uncle Robert and Aunt Maria both started somewhere for pails of water, while papa and mamma began tugging at a piece of carpet to smother the blaze.

And then, all at once, there was somebody else at work, and there came a hissing sound, as if water was being put on the flames, and right among them stood Eb, with something over his shoulder and under his arm, and in his hand there was a sort of a tube that sent a stream of water just where it was needed, and that put out the burning cotton in just about the time it has taken me to tell about it. When Aunt Maria and Uncle Robert came hurrying back with pails of water, there was no use for them. Papa and mamma and Nellie and Tom were gathered about Eb, more interested in what he had under his arm and over his shoulder than in the Christmas tree, which was scarcely damaged at all, for the flames had not reached the presents, and there was only a little water on Tommy's train, which hadn't even stopped running, being the kind of train, Tommy said, that didn't mind a little thing like lightning and rain.

"Why, it's Eb's fire-extinguisher!" said Uncle Robert. "I forgot all about that!"

"But Eb didn't!" said Tommy. "He put it in here last night, because he knew there'd be a fire with all that cotton of yours, sis."

"He knew you'd knock over a candle, I guess," retorted Nell.

Then the wet cotton was taken away, and the presents rearranged about the tree, and Tommy's train wound up again, and everything was as fine as if nothing had happened, though they didn't any of them forget what might have happened if it hadn't been for Eb with his fire-extinguisher.

And that was one of the finest Christmases that ever was! And at dinner-time Eb was there, with his bright new tie on, and sat right by Nellie, and was almost like the hero of the day. And after the turkey was carved, Mr. William Whittaker said, all at once, to Eben Lessing, as if he'd just happened to think of it:

"By-the-way, Eb, how would you like to take a course in a mechanical school? We've a good deal of room in our house, and now and then I need somebody to help me. You can come home with us and go to school, if you like."

And would you believe it, Eb couldn't say a word! He was like the others when he had flung open the door of the sitting-room and blinded them with the wonderful tree—he just sat there and blinked.

Nellie answered: "Of course, papa, Eb would like it. Wouldn't you, Eb?"

And then, somehow, Eb nodded, and somehow said something that was taken for yes, and then everybody began talking at once about the things Eb had made, and what he would do by-and-by, while Tommy, who, just at that moment, found out what it all meant, broke out with a great rejoicing,

"Whoop! Eb's going home with us! Eb's going home with us to live!"

And Nellie whispered, "Oh, Eb, didn't I tell you it was lucky you were living with Uncle Bob when we came to visit him?"

A NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS[1]

Temple Bailey

It was the night before Christmas—and stormy.

"Sqush—sqush," went the wheels of the carriage in the mud.

"Whew—ew—ew," whistled the wind, and it blew Peter's hat into the middle of the road.

"Whoa," said Peter, and climbed down from his high seat.

The "Princess" poked her head out of the window. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"My hat blew off," Peter told her, "and the wheel is stuck in the mud, Miss."

"Oh, Peter, Peter," the Princess chided, "you must get that wheel out of the mud at once."

"Which is easier said than done," Peter grumbled; "it's that dark that I can't see my hand before me."

"There's a light back there among the trees," the Princess informed him; "perhaps you could get some one to help you."

"I'll go and see, Miss, if you ain't afraid to stay alone," and Peter, after some effort, succeeded in quieting the plunging horses.

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"I am dreadfully afraid," came shiveringly, "but I suppose you will have to go."

Now in the middle of the pine grove was set a little cottage. Peter knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" asked a childish voice, and a little girl poked her head out of the square window.

"Our wheel is stuck in the mud," Peter answered, from the dark, "and I want to get a man to help me."

"There isn't any man here," Jenny informed him. "There is only me and Jinny; and our mother has gone to nurse a sick neighbor, and she won't be home until morning."

So Peter went back to the carriage and reported to the Princess.

"I shall freeze out here," said the Princess. "I will go up to the house and sit by the fire while you look for some one to help you with the carriage."

She climbed out of the carriage, and with Peter in the lead, she plodded through the woods, and the wind blew her long coat this way and that, and at last, wet and panting, she came to the little house.

And once more Peter knocked, and once more Jenny came to the window. Then she flung the door wide open, and so tall was the Princess that she had to stoop to enter it. It was a dingy little room, and there was a dumpy black stove in the corner, with a bubbling iron pot that gave forth a most appetizing odor.

"Oh, oh, how nice and warm it is," said the Princess, as she held out her hands to the fire.

In all their lives the little girls had never beheld such a wonderful person, for the Princess wore a long red coat and a black velvet hat with a waving plume, and her muff was big and round and soft, and she had a scarf of the same soft fur about her neck. Her hair was pale gold, and she had the bluest eyes and the reddest lips, and her smile was so sweet and tender, that Jenny ran right up to her and cried: "Oh, I am so glad you came!"

Jinny, from her little chair, echoed her sister's words. But she did not run, for there was a tiny crutch beside Jinny's chair in the square window.

"And I am glad to be here," said the Princess, whose quick eyes were taking in the details of the shabby room. "It's so nice and warm and cozy."

"Isn't it?" said Jenny, happily, "and we are getting ready for to-morrow."

On a small round table beside Jinny's chair was a tiny cedar bush, and Jinny's fingers had been busy with bits of gold and blue and scarlet paper.

"We are going to pop some popcorn," Jenny explained, "and string it, and hang it on the tree."

"Oh, may I help?" the Princess asked. "I haven't popped any corn since I was a little girl."

Jinny clasped her thin little hands. "I think it would be the loveliest thing in the world," she said, "if you would stay."

"Peter is going to find some one to help with the carriage, and I will stay until he comes back."

And when Peter had gone, the Princess slipped off the long red coat, and underneath it she wore a shin-

ing silken gown and around her neck was a collar of pearls.

"And now, if you could lend me an apron," she said, "we will pop the corn."

But Jinny and Jenny were gazing at her speechless.

"Oh, you must be a fairy Princess," gasped little Jinny at last.

The beautiful lady laughed joyously. "Peter calls me the Princess," she said; "he has lived with me ever since I was a little girl. But really I am just an every-day young woman, who is going to spend Christmas with some friends in the next town."

She dismissed the subject with a wave of her hand.

"And now to our popcorn," she said.

Jenny brought a green gingham apron, and the Princess tied it on, making a big butterfly bow of the strings in the back, and then she danced over to the dumpy little stove and peeped into the bubbling pot.

"Did you ever smell anything so good?" she asked. "I am as hungry as hungry."

The little girls laughed joyously. "It's bean soup," Jenny said, "and we are going to have it for supper with some little dumplings in it. I was afraid it wasn't nice enough for you."

"Nice enough?" the delightful lady demanded. "I think bean soup and little dumplings are—um—um!" and she flung out her hands expressively.

"I thought," Jinny remarked quaintly, "that fairy princesses only ate honey and dew."

"Which shows that I am not a true Princess," said the beautiful lady, "for honey and dew would never satisfy me."

Jenny got out three little blue bowls and set them on a table that was spread with a coarse but spotless cloth. There was a crusty loaf and clover-sweet butter, and last and best of all there was the bean soup and the bobbing little dumplings served together in an old mulberry tureen.

It was perfectly wonderful to see the Princess in her shining gown at the head of the table, and little lame Jinny said, "You were just sent to us for Christmas. Why, it's just like

"the night before Christmas, when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads—"

"But our stockings weren't hung yet, and *we* weren't in bed!" said Jenny.

"It was too early for that," said the Princess; "but let's go on with the rhyme, just for fun. I see you know it all through, so you mustn't mind my changing it a little:

"When out on the lawn, there arose such a clatter,
Jenny sprang from her chair to see what was the matter.

Away to the window she flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
When, what to her wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer—

"Oh, no, I forgot! I mean

"When what to her wondering eyes should appear
But a carriage stuck in the mud, right out here—
And a little old driver, so lively and quick,
You must have thought Peter was dear old St. Nick!"

The children laughed gleefully, and Jenny said: "We *would* have thought that, only we aren't going to hang up our stockings this Christmas at all. Jenny and I aren't going to get any presents, for mother hasn't been well, and she couldn't get any sewing. But she said we could make our Christmas merry, and we were to pretend that we had been to the big stores in the city, and had bought things for the tree, and dolls and everything."

"That's a lovely way," said the Princess gently, and she laid her flashing rings over Jinny's thin one.

"And we are going to pretend," Jenny contributed, "that our chicken is a turkey. But we won't have to pretend about the mince pie, for mother has made a lovely one."

"I wish I could help you eat the chicken," said the Princess wistfully, "and I should like to meet your mother. I know she is home-y. And I haven't any mother, you know."

"Oh," said the little girls, round-eyed with sym-

pathy, and then the Princess told them that all her life she had lived in a big, lonely house, and she had always yearned for a cozy home and for a sister.

After supper they popped the corn, and just as they finished in came Peter.

"I can't find any one to help, Miss," he announced, "and it's snowing. I'll have to unhitch the horses and go back to town, and get something to take you over in."

"No," the Princess demurred, as she stood in the middle of the room with a heaped-up dish of snowy kernels in her hand. "No, Peter, I am going to stay here all night."

Peter stared, and the little girls cried, "Oh, will you?"

And the Princess said, "I really will. And, Peter, you can bring up the steamer trunk and my bag."

"Won't your friends expect you, Miss?" Peter inquired, as if awaiting orders.

"I will send a note by you," was the calm response, and as the man went out she followed him and shut the door behind her. "Oh, Peter, Peter," she whispered confidentially, "I am going to give them such a Christmas!"

"The little girls, Miss?"

"Yes. They are so sweet and brave. And I have the presents in my trunk that I was going to carry to the other children. But they will have so much that they won't miss them, and I shall spend my Christmas in a plain little house, but it will be a joyful house, Peter."

"Yes, Miss," Peter agreed, understandingly.

"I wish we had a big tree!" said the Princess, regretfully.

"Well, leave that to me, Miss," Peter told her, eagerly; "you just get them little things to sleep early, and I'll be here with a tree."

"Oh, Peter, Peter Santa Claus!" exclaimed the Princess, gleefully, "it will be the nicest Christmas that I have had since I was a wee bit of a girl."

So Peter went away, and the Princess, with her eyes shining like stars, danced back into the room and said, "Oh, let's play 'Mariners.' "

Jinny and Jenny had never heard of such a game, but the Princess told them that she was a ship on the high seas, and they were to tell from her cargo what country she hailed from.

"I carry tea," she began; "where do I hail from?"

"China," guessed Jenny.

"No."

"Japan," cried Jinny, with her little face glowing.

"No."

Then the little girls pondered. "It might be India," ventured Jenny, but the Princess shook her head. Then Jinny cried: "It's Ceylon!" and that was right.

And after that Jinny brought a cargo of oranges from Florida and Jenny brought a cargo of rugs from Persia, and there were cargoes of spices and of coal and of coffee and of fish and of grain and of

lumber, and the Princess finished triumphantly by carrying a cargo of oysters from the Chesapeake Bay.

"One more," begged Jinny.

"I carry a cargo of castles," said the sparkling Princess; "where do I hail from?"

The little girls guessed and guessed, and at last the Princess said:

"That wasn't a fair one, really, for my castles are castles in Spain."

Then, with Jinny in her arms, she told them of her own castle-building, and when she had finished, she said: "And so your mother shall have all of my sewing, and that will keep her busy until Spring."

"Oh, you are going to be married, and live happy ever after," sighed Jinny, rapturously; "it's just what a fairy Princess should do."

"And what you should do," said the Princess, looking at the clock, "is to go to bed, bed, bed, so that you can wake up early in the morning."

She tucked them in, and came back later in a fascinating pink kimono with her hair in a thick yellow braid, and she kissed them both. But it was little lame Jinny that she kissed last. And then she went away, like a glorious vision, and the little girls sank into slumber.

In the next room the Princess opened the door cautiously, and there was Peter with snow all over him, and his arms were full of holly and mistletoe, and a great tree was propped against the door-post.

"Quietly, quietly, Peter," warned the Princess.

And Peter tiptoed in and set the tree up in the corner, and its top reached to the ceiling.

The Princess opened the steamer trunk and took out two white Teddy-bears, one with a flaring blue bow and the other with a flaring pink one, and then she took out a green and yellow and a red and a blue fairy book, and a beautiful square basket of candy, tied with holly ribbon, and then from the very bottom of the trunk she drew string after string of shining little silver bells, fastened on red and pale green ribbons.

"I was going to get up a cotillion figure for the children at the other house," the Princess explained to Peter, "but these little folks need it so much more."

The little bells went "tinkle, tinkle," as Peter hung them, and Jinny, dreaming in her little bed, heard the sound and thought it a part of her dream.

And while Peter and the Princess trimmed and whispered and laughed, some one rattled the door-knob.

Peter opened the door, and there stood a white-faced, shivering little woman.

"Oh, what has happened to my little girls," she panted. "I saw the light and it is so late—" then as she beheld the golden-haired vision in pink, and the gay tree, and Peter in his trim livery, she gasped, "Why, I believe it is fairies—" and she sat down very suddenly in Jinny's chair.

"You are the little mother," said the Princess, and she knelt beside her, and put her arms around

her, and told her how she came to be there; and when she had finished, she said, simply, "and I have wanted my own mother so much this Christmas, and the little girls were so sweet, that I knew I should love you."

"You poor little thing," cried the little mother to the tall Princess; and the beautiful lady put her head down on the other's shabby shoulder and wept, because in spite of her riches she had been very, very lonely in her big house.

And after Peter had gone, they talked until midnight of Jinny and Jenny; and then they concocted great plans about the pretty things that the little mother was to make for the Princess.

And in the morning, Jinny and Jenny, waking in the early dawn, saw, sitting on the foot-board of the bed, two Teddy-bears, one with a flaring pink bow and one with a flaring blue bow, and the Teddy-bears held out their arms saucily and gazed at the happy little girls with twinkling eyes.

"Oo-oh," cried the little girls, who had never seen a Teddy-bear before; and that was the beginning of the most wonderful day of their lives, for all day the tree went "tinkle, tinkle" as they foraged in its branches for bon-bons, and the chicken dinner was a delicious success, and in the afternoon they all took a ride in the Princess' sleigh, with Peter driving on the box, and when at last he set them down on their own humble door-step, and lifted little Jinny in his arms, the Princess smiled at them radiantly from under her plumy hat.

"Remember, Peter will come for you every Saturday, and you are to stay at my house all day," she said.

"Oh, yes," Jenny sighed with rapture.

"And you are to come to my wedding in the spring —all of you!" said the Princess, gaily.

"And see the Prince!" said Jinny, over Peter's shoulder.

"And you are going to let me share a third of your mother?"

"Yes, oh, yes," from both of the little girls.

"Then you shall share a third of Peter," the Princess called back, as the smiling coachman drove her away through the glistening snow.

DAME QUIMP'S QUEST[1]

Ellen Manly

Farmer Jones was standing at his front gate one bright December morning when a quaint figure came hurrying along the road—a bent old woman in a long blue cloak, with the ruffles of a big cap flopping about her wrinkled face.

"Good day!" said she, as soon as she was near enough to be heard. "You're Farmer Jones, I believe. I think you will do nicely to head the procession—just step right behind me and we'll move on!"

"And, pray, who are you and what should I be doing in a procession?" cried the astonished man. "I'm quite too busy to leave home to-day!"

"Never mind!" answered the old crone, "I know all about *you,* for I've heard you grumbling over the weather many a time. As I came down the hill just now you were complaining at the cold and wishing it were June—you're a regular 'weather fretter!' I'm the Grumble Collector, and you'd better do just as you're told or there'll be trouble. My name is Dame Quimp, and my work is to hunt up grumblers and bring them to my old friend Santa Claus before Christmas. If there's anything he

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hates, it is grumbling, and he says he is going to teach some folks a lesson this year.

"It's no use to say a word—just follow me, and be quick about it, too!" So off started Dame Quimp with Farmer Jones behind her, grumbling as he went.

She soon stopped short before a little house by the roadside and listened a moment. There was a sound of violent stamping, and an angry voice cried out: "I hate that old dress and I won't wear the ugly thing! I never have any pretty clothes!" and out on the porch rushed the milliner's little daughter, in a fine temper.

"Hoity-toity!" cried the dame. "You're a pleasant little girl, to be sure! Just the one I'm looking for! Never mind asking 'Why?' but stop scolding at once and fall in line behind Farmer Jones."

The child looked crosser than ever and began to cry, but she couldn't help herself, and away went Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, and the milliner's little daughter.

As they neared the first corner, loud voices were heard and angry tones, and there stood the baker's boy and the grocer's clerk having a hot discussion. "It's too far!" cried the first. "I can't tramp way over on the hill for *anybody!* I hate to be sent on errands from morning till night from one end of town to the other!"

"So do I!" exclaimed the grocer's clerk. "I'm always being told to take something somewhere for somebody just when I want a little time to myself.

The skating's fine to-day and I ought to get off early, but I shan't be allowed to. It's a shame to have to carry bundles instead of being on the pond!"

"Very well, young men!" cried Dame Quimp, "you shall have a nice long walk. I'm very pleased to meet you! Just step next in line to the little girl and we'll hurry along! No questions, please!"

So off went Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, and the grocer's clerk.

As they passed the doctor's house, the cook, in her apron and cap, was standing at the gate grumbling to the ice-man. "Shure an' 't is nothin' but cook, cook, cook, all day long, an' meals havin' to be kept hot fer a man that's niver in the house when he ought to be! I'm that tired of wurruk that I've a foine mind to tell him he may cook fer himself fer a while!"

"All right, Bridget!" called Dame Quimp, sharply. "You step off right now! Just take your place next to the grocer's clerk and we'll move on!" And away again went Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, and the doctor's cook.

Pretty soon they came to little Tommy Brooks's house, and there was Tommy at the front door fussing with his mother. "I don't need any overcoat!" cried he, "and I can't wear rubbers,—they hurt my feet,—and I left my mittens at school! I hate to be bundled up just like a girl, anyway, and I wish people would let little boys alone!"

"Thomas Brooks!" called out the dame, severely, "you put on that overcoat and those rubbers at once and get behind the doctor's cook—you're the boy for me! Step lively, now, all of you!" And off started Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, and little Tommy Brooks.

A little farther up the street the shoemaker's wife was grumbling to a neighbor, as she shook out her duster on the porch. "I've no patience with housekeeping!" declared the sharp voice. "I don't do anything but chase dirt from morning till night, and yet the place is never clean—and my work is never done. Yes, it *is* a comfortable and pretty house, but I'm tired of the sight of it! I have to go and sweep the dining-room this very minute!"

"Oh no! not at all!" cried Dame Quimp. "That nice home of yours won't get any more cleaning *this* day! You can fall right in line behind Tommy Brooks, and no remarks, if you please!"

So off they went again—Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, little Tommy Brooks, and the shoemaker's wife.

At the turn of the road there was the sound of excited talking and high words, and there stood the minister's twin grandchildren quarreling over a sled and a pair of skates.

"I don't want the old sled!" cried the boy. "I do nothing but give you rides on it! You can just let me

have the skates, and drag the sled, yourself, for a while!"

"Take the old skates!" answered the little girl, angrily. "I can't stand up on them, anyway, and I'm tired of trying, and I don't want the sled, either. I wish people would give us some *nice* presents. What's the use of being twins if you can't have a good time?"

"Sure enough!" cried Dame Quimp. "Two nice little children who can't be happy with a fine sled and a pair of new skates—I never heard of such a thing! Come right here and take places behind the shoemaker's wife; and don't cry about it, either, for there's no time to lose!" And away hurried Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, little Tommy Brooks, the shoemaker's wife, and the minister's twin grandchildren.

Before long they came to the beautiful big house where the banker lived, and there, just coming out of the gate, they met the governess, looking much distressed and almost in tears. "What can I do for you, my dear?" asked Dame Quimp, anxiously; "you seem to be in trouble. I'm the Grumble Collector, and perhaps I can help you."

"Indeed you can," said the governess, eagerly, "if you will only tell me what to do with the banker's Dorothy. She has everything in the world to please and amuse her, and yet she's always in a fret. As for clothes, she has so many pretty things

that she can't tell which she wants to wear. I ran away just now because I was quite worn out with her grumbling. I left her fussing over a pink, a blue, and a green frock, trying to decide which to put on, and in such a temper that she couldn't look nice in anything."

"I see! I see!" replied the dame; "a very bad case indeed! Just bring her to me at once and she shall report to Santa Claus— Ah, here she is! Come right along, Dorothy; you're just the kind of little girl needed in this procession! Stop fretting, directly, and step in line behind the minister's twin grandchildren and we'll move on!"

And away again went Dame Quimp, Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, little Tommy Brooks, the shoemaker's wife, the minister's twin grandchildren, and the banker's Dorothy.

"Let me see," said the dame, as they reached the end of the street; "I think I have heard that the barber's grandmother was a terrible grumbler—I might try to find out." So at a little house at the corner they all waited while she knocked vigorously at the door. It was opened quickly by a sharp-looking little old woman who held on her arm a big basket of mending.

"What do you want!" she said crossly. "I haven't time to say a word to anybody, so I can't ask you in. I'm just as fretted as I can be with all this mending to do! I do think that after darning socks for nearly fifty years I might be allowed to hold my

hands for a bit; but every week here's this great basket full and nobody but me to attend to it. It makes me so cross that I grumble over every pair of the old socks— I wish they were in Guinea!"

"Tut! Tut!" replied Dame Quimp, sternly. "I don't know much about Guinea, but I do know where *you're* going! You're the very one to finish my collection. Set down that basket at once and put on a warm cloak and hood and follow the banker's Dorothy, and we'll go straight to Santa Claus—he'll be quite horrified to see such a string of grumblers!"

So off once more went Dame Quimp, with Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, little Tommy Brooks, the shoemaker's wife, the minister's twin grandchildren, the banker's Dorothy, and the barber's grandmother, all following behind her, one after another.

They walked and they walked,—over the bridge and past the mill; out beyond the golf-links; up one hill and down another; across ploughed fields, and through narrow woodland paths, till they were all very tired and cold, and the barber's grandmother, being such an old woman, was quite worn out. Dame Quimp, however, would listen to no complaints, but kept them all strictly in line and hurried them on, until, in a couple of hours' time, they reached Christmas Town.

They found Santa Claus in his shop busily engaged in tying up delightful-looking parcels in gay paper, with seals and labels, gold and silver cord,

scarlet and green ribbons, and sprigs of holly scattered around him in every direction.

"Good day, old friend!" cried Dame Quimp as she entered. "I have done a good morning's work, as you see—all these are fine, first-class grumblers, and not one of them deserves a Christmas gift. Let me introduce them—here are Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, little Tommy Brooks, the shoemaker's wife, the minister's twin grandchildren, the banker's Dorothy, and the barber's grandmother. Take a good look at them so you will make no mistakes."

"Oh dear, dear!" cried Santa Claus, in much distress. "Is it really as bad as that! I never should have thought you could find so many grumbly people in a town full of pleasant things, with so much to make them happy! I suppose I ought to give them a severe lesson to check this terrible habit, but I'm afraid, Dame, that I should quite spoil my own Christmas pleasure if I were to pass them all by!

"What can be done about it? Don't you think we might let them off *this* time with a warning? I'm sure you must already have given them a pretty good scolding, for it seems to me you are getting to be quite a grumbler yourself, and I have no doubt you have been lecturing them all along the way."

"Indeed I have!" replied the dame, "and a thankless job it was! They're a troublesome lot, I tell you, and you'd better not let them off too easily! But, of course, you must suit yourself."

"Oh dear! Oh dear!" cried Santa Claus again, as he tried to look sternly at the unhappy grumblers. "This is very sad—very sad indeed! It is too near Christmas for any one even to *look* cross, to say nothing of scolding!" And here his round face broke into a broad smile, and all the grumblers smiled, too.

"See, Dame Quimp!" cried he, eagerly, "these poor people are all in a good temper already, and I feel sure that, if I trust them, they will try very hard not to be grumblers any longer. Is it not so, my friends?"

And Farmer Jones, the milliner's little daughter, the baker's boy, the grocer's clerk, the doctor's cook, little Tommy Brooks, the shoemaker's wife, the minister's twin grandchildren, the banker's Dorothy, and the barber's grandmother, all promptly answered, "Yes!"

"Now hurry home as fast as you can," said Santa Claus, giving them each a big stick of candy. "You have been gone so long that your friends will be anxiously wondering where you are. Dame Quimp and the barber's grandmother will wait and have a cup of tea with me, and I will take them home in my sleigh a little later."

There was a perfect chorus of thanks and promises, a beaming smile from Santa Claus, a reluctant grunt of farewell from Dame Quimp, and each member of the grumbler procession set out at best speed on the return trip.

It was late when they all reached home, but,

strange to say, with the exception of the doctor's cook, the baker's boy, and the grocer's clerk, not one of them had been missed, for the various friends and relations had been having such a delightfully quiet and restful afternoon that they had forgotten all about the departed grumblers.

WHEN CHRISTMAS CAME AGAIN [1]

Beulah Marie Dix

"I WANT to go," said Justine Eliot, "where I won't even hear the word Christmas. If you'd only open the camp, Doctor Sarah, we could stay there, just by our two selves, until these ghastly holidays are over. Oh, won't you, please?"

Justine Eliot was nineteen, far richer in money than she needed to be, and as pretty as a blush-rose. Until a year ago she had known nothing but sunshine. This fact Dr. Sarah Peavey took into swift account, and she did not say, "Don't be a coward! Face it out!"

"You see, there were two of us a year ago," Justine went on, "and now I'm all alone. Oh, if I'd only gone down-town that day with mother! But she said it was a secret, and I wasn't to come. And I said I didn't want to come, for I had a secret, too. It was a pillow I was covering for her as a Christmas present—the fir-balsam pillow that I'd made that summer at the camp. I finished it that afternoon, and tied it up with red ribbons. There were Christmas wreaths in all the windows, and holly paper and

[1] This story was first printed in "Youth's Companion," December 14, 1911. Reprinted by permission of the author and "Youth's Companion."

red ribbon everywhere. You know how mother loved the Christmas season, and how she remembered everybody. Oh, it was too cruel that she should leave us then! And if I'd only been with her, I know it wouldn't have happened. But that crowded, slippery crossing, and that automobile bearing down—and I wasn't there! I never want to see green holly or red ribbons again. I think if I hear people say, 'Merry Christmas!' I shall die. And I wish I could!"

Justine broke into sobs, with her face in her hands.

For a moment Doctor Peavey watched her through narrowed eyelids. Then she took a time-table from the drawer of her desk, and said:

"I'll leave my patients with Deering. I'll telegraph Serena Wetherbee to open the camp for us. Meet me at the station to-morrow evening, and—"

"Doctor Sarah! Then you will?"

"Yes, I'll take you where Christmas won't find you—if I can!"

Surely no better refuge could have been found for Christmas fugitives than the camp on Nobsco Head. Clad in black firs and bound with iron rock, the headland thrust itself into the icy waters of the bay. Half-buried now in the white drifts of winter, the little house stood solitary—three miles by road from the village of Crosset Cove, and a half-mile, at least, from the little settlement known as Hardscrabble.

It was from Hardscrabble that Serena Wetherbee came—a grim, gaunt woman, who not only had lost three children, but had never learned from the

waves where they had flung the body of her sailor husband. To warn her not to talk of Christmas seemed superfluous. But on the fourth evening, while they were all three sitting round the glowing air-tight stove in the camp living-room, Justine politely asked Serena what she was knitting, and received an unexpected answer.

"Christmas presents," said Serena Wetherbee. "A pair of mittens for Jacob Tracy, and striped reins for his little sister Emmy. Haven't you noticed? He's Heman Tracy's boy, that brings the milk over from Hardscrabble, and they're poorer than Job's turkey. There'll be a tree over at Hardscrabble schoolhouse,—there always is,—and those Tracy young ones shan't go without presents, not while I'm afoot."

With a word of excuse and good night, Justine rose and went to her room. But Serena Wetherbee talked on:

"I don't know, after all, if there'll be a tree this year at Hardscrabble. Have you seen the schoolma'am, Doctor Sarah? She's a Nash, from over in Jefferson—one of those bred-in-the-bone old maids that would turn cream sour just by looking at it. Like as not she'll set up for not having a tree to the schoolhouse."

But evidently Serena did not believe this dire prophecy, for she was as horrified as Doctor Peavey by the developments of the next day. The two women were in the kitchen when small Jacob Tracy clumped in out of the twilight, leading a sobbing little sister.

"Now you just shut up, Emmy Tracy!" Jacob said, but not unkindly. "You ask Aunt Sereny and she'll tell you it ain't so at all."

Serena Wetherbee lifted the child to her lap.

"Tell aunty all about it, deary!"

"She says—teacher says—there ain't—there ain't no Sa-anta Claus—and there won't be a tree at Hardscrabble—and no Christmas! And I'd wrote Santa Claus—to bring me a dolly with hair—and there ain't—there ain't no—"

"Teacher doesn't know everything!" snapped Serena Wetherbee.

With assurances and molasses cookies, the two women comforted the child. She left the house with a watery smile, but Jacob lingered to say:

"And do you think he'll come to Hardscrabble, for all she said?"

A few moments later, when Doctor Peavey passed through the open door to the living-room, she found Justine seated with a book at the table.

"What were they crying for?" asked Justine.

"Miss Nash, who teaches the school at Hardscrabble, where the little ones go, told them that there was no Santa Claus."

"To tell a child that at Christmas time!" flashed Justine. "She ought to be whipped!"

"That wouldn't help the children much," said Doctor Peavey, mildly, "or her, either."

To Justine Doctor Peavey said no more, but she took counsel with Serena. That evening, after Justine had gone thoughtfully to bed, Doctor Peavey

made out a list of the names and ages of the eighteen children who went to the little school at Hardscrabble. On the same sheet she made some tentative calculations—so much for oranges, so much for crinkly Christmas candy, so much for gifts, to be bought at the ten-cent store at Hanscomville. It was only a small sum, but, small as it was, it meant that Doctor Peavey would go without the evenings at the opera which were the one luxury of her winter.

The next morning, December 22d, Doctor Peavey tucked her list into her pocket and started afoot for Hardscrabble, where she planned to hire a horse and pung from Cephas Tooke. She had bidden Justine good-by for the day without explanation. A little wholesome neglect would be tonic for Justine, she believed; and she believed also that you may sometimes attain your goal, like Alice in the Looking-Glass country, by walking away from it.

She was to have speedy confirmation of her belief. She had barely started down the shining hill slope to the wood-path, when she heard the crackling of a step behind her, and turned to see Justine, as warmly bundled up as she was herself, with her purse in her mittened hand. The color came and went in Justine's cheeks. For the moment she seemed again the girl that Doctor Peavey had known in joyous summers at the camp.

"Doctor Sarah!" Justine began, breathlessly. "I didn't mean to peep, but your writing is so big and clear! I only glanced at your list by mistake, but

I knew in a minute, and I might have known anyway, knowing you. But why didn't you ask me to help? Oh, you surely don't think I'm like that horrible Miss Nash? I don't want Christmas for myself ever again, but I wouldn't take it away from other people, and least of all from little children. So let me help, please!"

For one second Doctor Peavey's heart contracted. She saw the purse in Justine's hand, and she read the passing thought in Justine's mind. Would she have to tell Justine that money alone could not buy a Christmas gift, even of the poorest sort? But Mrs. Eliot, as Doctor Peavey had often said, was one of the finest women that she had ever known, and Justine was her daughter.

"Oh!" said Justine, with a little catch of the breath. "You think that I should—" She slipped the purse into her pocket. "Of course you can't do it all alone. Eighteen children!" she cried. "I'm coming with you, Doctor Sarah!"

Together they trudged through the cathedral gloom of the firs and over the dazzling whiteness of the fields to Hardscrabble. Together they clambered into the ramshackle pung and drove the nine bright miles to Hanscomville. Such plans as they made on that drive! They would have a tree set up in Serena Wetherbee's cottage, if the odious Miss Nash still refused to let them have the schoolhouse. They would string pop-corn and red cranberries by the yard.

"And we'll buy lots of sparkly snow and shiny

doodaddles at the ten-cent store!" cried Justine. Her eyes were as bright as Christmas stars.

"We'll cut the candy-bags in the shape of stockings. And we'll buy a 'dolly with hair' for that wee Emmy. I'll have time to make it a dress and a petticoat, at least. And I'm going to get a sled for Jacob Tracy."

So they planned all along the road, which seemed short, and in Hanscomville they made the plans come true. Up and down the little main street they bustled, and made their purchases, Doctor Peavey painstakingly, Justine with a lavish hand.

Presently they were stuffing packages into the pung—bags of oranges and nuts and Christmas candies from the grocer's, bulging, frail bundles from the ten-cent store, skates and pocket-knives—an extravagance at which Doctor Peavey held up her hands—from the hardware shop, and even lordly, important-looking parcels from the general store. Among the last was a doll's carriage.

"It's for Emmy's doll," said Justine, "and we must find room for it, even if we have to tow it behind the pung."

On the way home they chatted about their Christmas tree.

"It's the sort of thing that mother would have loved to do," Justine said, and then she began to talk about her mother, and to tell sweet, homely incidents of the life that they had lived together.

They had passed through Crosset Cove when Doc-

tor Peavey broke the not unhappy silence into which they had lapsed.

"Justine! If we haven't forgotten to get a present for the schoolteacher!"

"For that Nash woman?" cried Justine. "She doesn't deserve a present. I shouldn't like to say what she does deserve."

Then they reached the long tug of Nobsco Hill, where, in mercy to the tired old horse, they got out and walked. At the top of the hill they overtook a woman, who was trudging on foot in the twilight. She was thirty, perhaps, with a thin, tired face. She wore a coat that was not thick enough, and a little, old-fashioned neck-piece of worn fur. She was dragging a small fir-tree through the snow, and every little while she stopped to beat her numbed hands together.

"I thought I knew everybody in these parts," said Doctor Peavey, under her breath, "but she's a stranger. Why, it must be Miss Nash!"

The woman turned as Doctor Peavey spoke to her. Oh, yes, she would be glad of a lift, she said, in a tired voice. She had been out getting a little tree for her school children. She did not want them to think that Santa Claus had forgotten them.

Doctor Peavey's eyes, seeking Justine's, read assent in their softened expression.

"We were planning a little surprise for your children," she said, "but we'll need help to put it through. Couldn't you spend the night with us, and string cranberries and sew candy-bags?"

So the amazing thing came to pass—the odious Miss Nash sat that evening at the camp table, and worked swiftly to make real the Christmas plans. So silent and so white she was that even Serena forbore to sniff at her.

And a yet more amazing thing came to pass. The next morning, when Doctor Peavey had prepared a hot early breakfast for Miss Nash, and had set her part way on her road to the schoolhouse, she returned to camp to find Justine—the old Justine of Nobsco summers—waiting to confide in her.

"She isn't horrid at all!" Justine broke out. "It's Ellen Nash, I mean. After you sent us upstairs last night and said that we must rest—did you do it on purpose, Doctor Sarah?—she talked to me. She said she hadn't talked in months. It was the picture, you know, there on my bureau. She asked if it was my mother, and I—I told her how she died a year ago. And then she told me. Doctor Sarah, there are just she and her mother—and her mother is at the sanitarium with tuberculosis. What chance she has to get well is spoiled by her fretting to have her daughter near her, and they have so little money that that is out of the question. So Ellen Nash has been trying to earn a little by teaching. On Wednesday she got notice from the committee that she wouldn't be reëngaged for next term. And the same day she had a letter from her mother—a pitiful letter! That Christmas was coming, and they couldn't be together—that they would never be together! And she says she guesses she was half-crazy,

but that morning, when little Emmy Tracy asked her if Santa Claus would come this Christmas, she answered right out of her heart that there wasn't any Santa Claus, and that all the talk about love and Christmas fellowship was just a story. O poor thing! I can understand! Why, Doctor Sarah, she only went one little inch farther than I had gone, and she is so much worse off than I. For my blessed mother never suffered any, and we were together up to the very last hour. Doctor Sarah!"

"Yes, Justine?"

"I—I haven't been doing this year as mother would have expected me to do."

"That's all over now," said Doctor Peavey, heartily. She hardly knew how truly she had spoken, but she knew an hour later, when Justine again was at her side.

"Doctor Sarah," she said, with her old energy, "can we go home to-night, on the night train?"

"What of our tree at Hardscrabble?"

"Of course we won't disappoint the children. We'll write a letter, in the name of Santa Claus, and ask them to Serena Wetherbee's on Christmas day. She says she'd be glad to have them. You wouldn't think, to look at her dear old granite face, that she loved children so. And Ellen Nash will have the tree and the presents all ready. O Doctor Sarah, it would have made you cry to hear how she went out to get a tree, and had even taken some of her hard-earned money to buy nuts and apples for the

children, because she wanted to make up for what she had said! But now they'll have a sure-enough Christmas at Hardscrabble, and we'll go home. There's so much I must do, and only a day to do it in! So many children that mother wouldn't want to have go unremembered! And you, Doctor Sarah, you're willing to go home?"

"Yes," said Doctor Peavey.

It was a Christmas of bright sun and glad weather. Sarah Peavey and her sister set crimson roses beneath their mother's picture and opened their gifts in its presence. Sarah Peavey had the medical book that she had needed, and a brown print of a Madonna, and even a ticket for the opera. But the gift that she valued most came in the twilight. The telephone-bell rang, and over the wire came Justine Eliot's voice:

"Is it you, dear Doctor Sarah? I wanted to tell you. I've seen my old cousin Hester. She's tired of hiring maids, you know, and she's been looking for a woman to be a sort of companion housekeeper in her little apartment. I told her about Ellen Nash, and she's sending for her. She'll pay her three times what the Hardscrabble school paid, and Miss Nash will be able to go often to see her mother. Doctor Sarah!"

"Yes, Justine."

"Do you remember my telling you about that fir-balsam pillow I made up last year—the one I thought I couldn't ever touch again?"

"I remember, child."

"I sent it off yesterday, in holly wrappings—to Ellen Nash's mother. And that's all, Doctor Sarah, dear, only—I wanted to wish you—Merry Christmas!"

THE KING OF THE CHRISTMAS FEAST[1]

Elaine Sterne

The little boy in No. 60 pressed his nose against the cold window-pane and looked out over the school yard. It was a deserted white courtyard, with a few muddy footprints zigzagging across the snow toward the second dormitory. There was, to be sure, a rusty puddle in one corner where the drops from the rain-pipe spattered, but aside from that, four gray walls with staring windows looked him back square in the eye, no matter how far he twisted his head.

The little boy had been ill. Even now, a bright red flannel compress was wound about his tender throat, and he was propped up in a much-too-big Morris chair, with a plaid rug across his knees. There is nothing to being sick at school—nothing at all. The little boy in No. 60 could have told you that, because he had had two months of it, and only now, at Christmas time, had he begun to get well.

Of course, on the other hand, the infirmary is good sport, with Mrs. Darling fussing over you and feeding you hot broths from a little blue china bowl. But even with Mrs. Darling tucking you in here and patting you down there, and even with the boys

[1] Reprinted from "St. Nicholas Magazine" with permission.

stumbling in for a few minutes to chatter about the junior team and the senior squad, there is something very "wantable" that you miss most fearfully much. Something that begins with a capital "M." The little boy in No. 60 never let himself get farther than the capital "M," because his mother was a whole ocean away, and it wasn't any good wishing for her anyway, you see, it cost so much to come.

The little boy in No. 60 sat by the window a long time, until the shadows began to get long and black and reaching, and a crisp chilliness was in the air. He wound the plaid rug tightly about him, until only his sharp little chin peeked out, and he was glad when he heard the door click and Mrs. Darling rustled in.

"And was the little plum-pudding left all by himself?" she asked, switching on the lights briskly. "Such a busy day as it's been—what with putting the place to rights after the young gentlemen, and getting the perfessers off for the holiday, why we forgot all and everything about you. You're not cold, are you?"

"Not very," said the little boy, quietly; "not very, at all."

"Well, I'm having Nora build us a fire in the study, and I'll carry you down across my shoulder, like the little pack of bones that you are."

"Perhaps I could walk, if you—"

"Walk! And do you think I couldn't lift you,

after caring for you two whole months? Mercy! but the boy's getting well!''

Even as she spoke, she was bundling the plaid about him and lifting him gently. There is something rather revolting in having a woman carry you, just like a tiny baby, and the little boy's mouth stiffened, and he stuck out his chin.

''Just as you like,'' he said. ''Only do be sure nobody sees you doing it.''

Mrs. Darling laughed aloud. ''I'll be so careful that I'll drop you like a hot potato if any one comes sneaking around.''

And so the little boy in No. 60 was carried ignominiously down the long stairs, his fair head resting against Mrs. Darling's plump shoulder.

Nora, down on her hands and knees, was piling logs on a roaring fire. It did look cozy. The little boy was almost glad he had come, only fires and crackling logs somehow need a great laughing crew about them. You really shouldn't be at all lonesome beside a fire, because it is such a big, warm, glorious, friendly thing. Mrs. Darling set him down carefully and stuffed a pillow behind his back. The little boy quite hated the sight of a pillow, but he let it stay because it *did* feel good in that spot, and then she bustled away, for just ''half a minute,'' and left him watching Nora, still poking and prodding the fire as though she were trying to keep it awake.

Suddenly he spoke. ''Nora,'' he said, ''what ever are you crying for?''

Nora did not answer, but her shoulders began to shake, and she dropped the poker.

"Nora, I guess perhaps I know why you're crying," he said thoughtfully.

"O-o-h!" moaned Nora, her hands over her face. "It's homesick I am, and I've thried me bes' niver to shid a tear, an' now what'll Mrs. Darlin' say?"

"Never mind her," he said soothingly. "Never mind her at all. Perhaps, Nora, if you keep on crying, I'll cry too, and it wouldn't be very good for me, I don't—believe." There was the least bit of a catch in his voice, and Nora swung around.

"For shame on me!" she cried, "whin it's you as should be mournin'—bein' so sick an' little an' swate. Sure, an' don't you begin to cry, for Mrs. Darlin' will be blamin' me."

"I'll try not to," he said quietly. "I'll try very hard. Nora," he said, "have you a-a—m-oth—"

"No," she said, shaking her head, "I've niver had one—that is, since I was too schmall to remimber."

"Then what are you homesick for?"

"It's me brothers, and sisters, and their childer, an' the tree, an' stockin's,—an'—oh, it's Christmas—"

"I see," he said solemnly.

"Nora," he added suddenly, "why couldn't we have a tree?"

"Sure, an' where'd we get it?"

"I don't know, except where everybody gets trees —I guess you buy them."

"Yes, an' they're after costin' a heap of money, too."

"I suppose so," he said. Then he clasped his hands. "Nora," he said, "we simply *must* have some kind of a tree, because, you see, it wouldn't be Christmas at all if we didn't."

"There ain't nothin' in the house that'd do for a tree, I don't suppose."

"No—not unless—oh, Nora, the hat-tree! The *hat*-tree!"

"The hat-tree, is it? A shiny mahogany tree? Oh, it's better than that we can do."

"I believe," his eyes were very bright—"I believe that would do all right. Of course we'd have to pretend it was a glorious tree that reached to the ceiling, and that it was aglow with candles—and—and, Nora, w-we could play I was the king, and you, and Mrs. Darling, and old Patrick, and the cook were poor subjects that I had invited in for the—the —feast; and we could have apples—and stockings—and nuts—and—"

"Sure, I don't believe Mrs. Darlin' will be lettin' you do it."

But just at that moment Mrs. Darling, bearing a big tray, appeared.

"Guess what you're going to have for supper tonight," she called across the cloud of steam that rose, but the little boy was too eager to guess.

"Oh, Mrs. Darling!" he cried, "can't we have a Christmas party here? Can't we have you and Nora and Patrick and—"

"A Christmas party! And this Christmas eve! Whatever are you thinking of? With Nora, and old Patrick, and no tree or nothing—"

Something about the little boy's face stopped her short. Perhaps it was his eyes. You see, they had grown very large and "wishful" since his illness, and they had a way of speaking much more distinctly than his lips. He did not say a word, but just watched Mrs. Darling until she felt a big lump spring into her throat.

"I guess we can manage it somehow," she said suddenly, "although I don't see exactly how."

The little boy clapped his hands.

"Let me do it!" he cried. "I'm going to pretend that I am—well—a sort of a—" It was much easier telling Nora things than Mrs. Darling. Some people have such an understanding way.

"Sure," broke in Nora, "it's a king he's goin' to be, with us a-bowin' an' a-scrapin' before him!"

"I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind," said the little boy, apologetically, a pink flush mounting into his pale cheeks. "You see, it would only be pretending, and I—guess—perhaps—Patrick, and the cook, and Nora wouldn't mind pretending, on Christmas, just this once, when it's only a make-believe Christmas, after all."

"You can be as big a king as you want to," said Mrs. Darling, with a laugh, "if you eat the chicken soup I've brought you and the buttered toast."

The little boy sighed contentedly and obediently tucked a napkin under his chin. He could feed him-

self now. He was very glad of that. But to-night his hand trembled a bit, and he set down his spoon hastily.

"I don't believe I want any soup," he said slowly, but Mrs. Darling shook her head.

"Here, let me give it to you. And then you'll have time after dinner to think up what you are going to do. I believe we could roast some of the chestnuts Patrick picked up to-day."

So the little boy drank each mouthful as quickly as he could, and munched the toast without speaking another word. After he had finished, Mrs. Darling brought him a pad and pencil.

"Here, Your Majesty," she said, smiling, "write down your commands." The little boy's eyes brightened, and he looked up at her shyly.

"You don't mind playing it, do you?" he asked.

"Mind! Why, I guess it will do us all a world of good, old as we are," she said.

Of course after that, there was nothing for him to do but to write down, in a shaky hand, his commands.

"Cut down the highest tree in the forest," he wrote first. "It must be so high and so strong that it takes three men to chop it down. Then carry it into the banquet-hall and set it up." Here he stopped. "Do you suppose we *can* have the hat-tree, Mrs. Darling?" he asked.

"You can have anything you want," she said firmly.

"Order the Great-High-Tree-Trimmer, Sir Pat-

rick, to enter, and to hang the gold and silver bells on the tree, and to light the candles— We can pretend the hat-tree has candles on it, can't we?" he paused to ask.

"Of course we can," she assured him.

"Then light the— What was it they burned at Christmas, Mrs. Darling?"

"The Yule log."

"Yes. Light the Yule log, and pile up the presents under the tree—all kinds—whatever any one has ever wished for in the world. Then hang the stockings on the mantel, and let the Great-High-Filler, Lady Nora, fill them with toys and books and—and —electric engines. Then let the doors be flung open and the guests enter. There!" he said, with a little sigh, "that's all."

"That's enough for to-night," said Mrs. Darling, looking at his flushed cheeks. "Just put your seal to it."

The little boy solemnly wrote "Rex," just as he had seen it done in books, and handed the paper to Mrs. Darling with a smile.

"It will be a—a glorious—Christmas," he said bravely; "just a glorious one!" Then he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, for he was suddenly very tired.

Have you ever awakened on Christmas morning, with the cold clear sunlight slanting across your floor, and the blue sky peeking in your window, and

yet not even felt the least bit glad it *was* Christmas? The little boy opened his eyes and looked around as though he half expected to see a bursting stocking, and to hear his moth— He jerked over on his side. Even if it was Christmas morning, what was to prevent a fellow from taking another nap! But something hot and wet slid down his cheek, before he could stop it, and, as long as there wasn't any one around, it didn't make so much difference. But the little boy brushed it angrily away and sat up in bed.

"Merry Christmas!" he said fiercely to the table in the corner. "Merry Christmas!" and he lay back on his pillows with his eyes fixed on the ceiling and his lip between his teeth. Somebody was whistling in the lower corridor. He could hear it quite distinctly, and it sounded so glad and cheerful that the little boy slid to the floor, although his legs wabbled under him, and opened the door.

"Hullo, down there!" he called over the banisters. "Merry Christmas!"

"Hullo, up there!" came back old Patrick's crackled voice. "Merry Christmas, Your Majesty."

The little boy laughed out loud.

"Patrick, Patrick, do come up! How did you know to call me that?"

"Sure, Your Majesty, I'll be there as soon as I mop up the last few steps. Git back into bed, and I'll come and pay you me respects."

The little boy climbed back gladly under the warm covers and waited for the old man, his eyes shining eagerly.

Patrick thumped heavily up the stairs, then rapped loudly on the little boy's door.

"You may enter," said the little boy, stiffly, though he did giggle just the least bit, for old Patrick had pulled off his cap and shuffled in with his head bent.

"The top o' th' mornin' to Your Majesty!" he said, his eyes twinkling.

"The same to you, Sir Patrick. Have you cut down the—the highest tree?"

"Sure, and it's so high that I'm after thinkin' the little people have bewitched it."

"And—and where have they put it?"

"Right beside your throne, Your Majesty."

"Oh," said the little boy, with a gasp, "I forgot about having a throne! Isn't that fine!"

"And the ceremonies are to begin immejetly after your royal breakfast."

"But, Patrick—Sir Patrick, I mean,—can we have the chestnuts you picked?"

"Sure thirty men have been gatherin' chestnuts for Your Majesty since yesterday mornin'—and the chief cook is roastin' 'em on the kitchen stove."

"Oh—oh—and when can we have the feast?"

"Whin every one's wished for whatever they wants the most in the world," said old Patrick, with never a smile, "and not a minute before!"

"What do you mean?"

"Just that, Your Majesty; just that!" he said solemnly as he backed out of the room.

"Oh, wait, Sir Patrick!" the little boy cried.

"I can't wait, Your Majesty, for there's much to be done, includin' shovelin' the snow off the front path." And with a wave of his hand he was gone.

The little boy bombarded Mrs. Darling with questions when she appeared with his breakfast.

"What did Patrick mean? When are we going to begin? Oh, what ever does Patrick, and Nora, and the cook want for Christmas? What do you suppose I can give them that will make them ever so happy?"

"Help! help! Your Majesty!" cried Mrs. Darling, putting her hands over her ears. But the little boy persisted.

"Please, couldn't I give them something?"

"Well," said Mrs. Darling, importantly, "if you won't tell, I have a present for each one of them."

"Oh, but you had them to give yourself!"

"It doesn't matter who gives things, Your Majesty, so long as people get them. It's the getting them that counts."

The little boy nodded gravely. There was a great deal in that. And he waited for Mrs. Darling to continue.

"There are a pair of heavy woolen mittens for Patrick to keep his hands warm all winter, and for Nora a red scarf of just the right shade to set off her black hair and eyes. For the cook there is a stout new pair of overshoes, hers being worn to the very sole."

But still the boy was not satisfied. Mrs. Darling saw it in his eyes, and she guessed the reason.

"As for me," she said carelessly, "I don't ex-

pect to get anything—let alone what I really want and need most of anything in the world."

"W-what *do* you need?" asked the little boy, eagerly, entirely forgetting about his breakfast.

Mrs. Darling shrugged her shoulders. "It's something I have use for every day, and nobody could be expected to think of it."

The little boy hitched his shoulders impatiently. "It's fun telling what you want, anyhow," he said.

"Well, then, I never can remember the things I have to do without putting them down on a pad, and I never have a pad handy. If only some one would string some sheets of paper together for me to scribble things on. But what's the use of talking! Whoever would think of such a thing!"

The little boy smothered a laugh the best way he could, and tried to look very solemn while Mrs. Darling lifted the tray off his knees.

"The packages have all got to be tied up, and, although I haven't a bit of red ribbon, pink and blue will do every bit as well," she said.

"Yes," agreed the little boy, "only—only don't come back for—about half an hour, will you? I want to write—to—well, some letters, you know."

Mrs. Darling nodded, and closed the door softly.

Of course, when you have only half an hour to make a whole Christmas present, it behooves you to hurry. The little boy reached over for his dressing-gown and slipped his arms into it, then drew on his slippers. He remembered his arithmetic

pad—or, rather, there *had* been an arithmetic pad before he was taken ill—and it ought to be in his desk drawer, behind the French Grammar. He opened the drawer and pushed aside the French Grammar with a shout, for there lay the pad! He lifted it out, and, as he did so, something slipped from its pages. It was a letter. He knew the writing, even if he had not recognized the foreign stamp. He stood very still, staring at it where it had fallen, a white blur, on the floor. Then he winked his eyes hard and picked it up.

"My darling little son," it ran, "if I could only be with you this—"

"Pshaw!" he said huskily, "it costs so much to come!" And he turned his back abruptly on the desk without another word.

When Mrs. Darling knocked at the door, a short time later, there was a long pause before a hurried "Come in," replied.

The little boy looked very uncomfortable, as though he were just about to be caught doing something he shouldn't do, and there was a look about one of his pillows as though something had been hastily stuffed beneath it. Mrs. Darling's arms were full of packages and paper, besides a quantity of pink and blue ribbon which gave her very much the appearance of a Maypole.

"Will Your Royal Majesty fasten up the presents now?" she asked.

"Yes," said the little boy, gravely; "but how about the stockings? There must be stockings."

"The stockings are already hung by the mantelpiece in the study, just as Your Majesty commanded, and Lady Nora is filling them with fudge and nuts and apples, besides a sprinkling of ginger-cookies, that she made at the last minute."

"O-o-oh!" cried the little boy; "how splendid!"

"And Sir Patrick is trimming up the tree with great boughs of evergreen."

The little boy's face was radiant.

"And nobody knows what they're going to get?"

"I should say not!" said Mrs. Darling; "although I heard Nora wishing for a red scarf a few minutes ago."

Then the little boy set to work. There are any quantity of ways to tie up Christmas presents so that they will look as though they were full of your heart's desire. Of course to do that you must have tissue-paper that is soft and crinkly, and red, red ribbon, besides a sprig of holly to lay across the top. The little boy had only stiff brown paper, but it did very well, for it bulged out in places where it shouldn't have, and made the packages look a great deal more imposing than they really were.

Mrs. Darling insisted on his getting dressed after that. There was a very best suit in the closet that he had not worn for weeks, and he slipped it on, although it hung rather loosely upon him.

"Kings always have to dress up," she explained; "that's one of the worst things about being a king." So the little boy submitted to having his hair brushed and his face washed, although he would a

great deal rather have been left alone to finish his present.

"Of course you can't go down into the study until the feast is ready," she said. "You see, every one is getting dressed for it, including old Patrick himself, so as to be fit to enter the banquet-hall."

The little boy nodded. He understood exactly how one must appear before a king, and he felt just a little sorry for Patrick and the rest. Mrs. Darling gathered up the packages.

"Nora is going to hang them on the tree," she explained, "and when the guests have all assembled, why, then I'll send the heralds to escort you to your court."

After Mrs. Darling had left him, he sat still a long time, listening to the hum of voices in the lower corridor. There was an excitement in the air, something that seemed to hum and throb and thrill. Perhaps it was the sweet smell of the cranberry sauce that was wafted up to him, or perhaps it was Nora's shrill whispering, but it was there—a great unknown *something* that sent the little boy's pulses leaping.

After a while, he heard some one stamping up the stairs.

"Sure and is the king ready for the feast?" called out Patrick's voice.

"Yes, oh, yes!" said the little boy, breathlessly; "but, Patrick, Patrick, do hang this on the tree for Mrs. Darling, won't—"

He stopped short, for at his door stood a bowing Patrick in a shabby black suit, and a curtseying

Nora in a bright blue dress. Between them they held a cushion. The little boy recognized it. It was one of the green plush cushions from the headmaster's couch, and he laughed aloud.

"If you'll be climbin' on the pillow," said Nora, as they lowered it between them, "we'll be carryin' you to the feast."

Somehow when the little boy—white and fair and eager—was perched on the cushion, he did look like a flaxen-haired little king, between two loyal subjects. It was a very serious matter to him, and although his mouth would curl at the corners when they fell out of step, his eyes were very grave, and he bowed his head first to Mrs. Darling, then to the cook, who awaited him at the foot of the stairs.

"Three cheers for the king!" shouted old Patrick at the top of his voice.

"Three cheers!" they called.

"Let the king make a speech," cried Patrick, and Mrs. Darling echoed, "Speech!"

"Oh!" cried the little boy. Then he recovered himself, and his eyes wandered over their heads, beyond, to the closed door. "Dear, dear people," he said, in a hurried, breathless sort of way, "may this be the—the—merriest Christmas you have ever had. May you get whatever you want—even if it is the impossiblest thing in the world—even if it—it—costs so much—"

"Ah hah!" cried Patrick quite forgetting that a king must never be interrupted, no matter how long

he takes. "Ah hah, it's a pair of gloves I'm wishin' for, but never a glove will I get!"

"And as for me," cried Mrs. Darling, "His Majesty is the only one who knows what I want, and that's quite enough, seeing it's such a hopeless thing!"

"It's a beautiful rid shawl I'm after wantin'," sighed Nora; "but it's niver a rid shawl I'll see this Christmas—"

"And I need a pair of overshoes the worst way," said the cook, smiling; "but whoever would think of that!"

"Oh!" cried the little boy, his eyes shining with gladness. "Oh! now we can surely go to the feast, for every one's wished for what they want most in the world—do hurry and open the door!"

"Wait!" said old Patrick, raising his hand, "I haven't heard His Majesty askin' for a thing—I—"

"But kings, Patrick—kings don't ever *get* things, they all the time *give* them!"

"This is Christmas, Your Majesty, and before that door is opened, every one, king included, wishes for the thing he wants most. Quick now—what'll you have?"

"Oh," said the little boy, suddenly shrinking, "please—*please*—"

"Go on, Your Majesty," said Patrick, firmly, "for until you wish the feast stays on the other side of the door."

"Oh—oh—" the little boy covered his face, "I—

I—mustn't even think about it—and—and I'm trying—"

"Is it a ball you're wantin'?"

"Oh, no!"

"A steam-engine?"

"No!"

"A pair of boxin'-gloves?"

"No—no—*no!* It's—my—mother—I want!" he said, with a sob.

'Hullo!" said Patrick, flinging the door open suddenly, "and why couldn't you have said that long ago, instid of keepin' her sittin' here and waitin' for you full half an hour—"

Late that night, after Nora, with her red scarf over her shoulders, had gathered up the remains of the Christmas feast, and only a low, red, cozy light gleamed beneath the burnt-out logs, the little boy raised his head from his mother's shoulder and laid his hand on her cheek.

"But it cost so much to come!" he said softly, with a little shake in his voice. She drew him down in her arms, with a way mothers have.

"Look!" she whispered, "there's the last spark! "Wish—quick—wish!"

"I wish," he said slowly, "—I wish every girl and boy in the world has had as happy a Christmas as I have. I wish—"

But he didn't get any farther, for the tiny red spark went out quite gently, as if it did not want at all to disturb the little boy in No. 60 and his mother.

NANCY'S SOUTHERN CHRISTMAS[1]

Harriet Prescott Spofford

They had always kept Christmas at home, even if in no very expensive way. On the very last one, Johnny had had his skates, tied to his stocking, and inside it, an orange and nuts and raisins, and some little trick-joke, and a stick of candy; and Robby had had his sled, and Marnie her book, and Bessie her tea-set; and Mr. Murtrie, the father, had a pair of wristers that Nancy had crocheted, and a muffler that his wife had knit; and the mother had a needle-book that Marnie had made, and a bread-plate that Johnny had whittled out, and a piece of jig-saw work from Robby, and a muff from the father. And Marnie had written a poem to Father and Mother, which all the others criticized violently and ruthlessly, but which was privately regarded as a great achievement by every one of them.

But what was there to do here with sleds and skates! Great use for a muff out in the middle of the Texas prairie, to which they had come from the North. Why, yesterday the thermometer was just at summer heat, and roses were blossoming!

At home how gay it was with every one coming

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and going, with purchases and parcels and merry secrets, with the hanging of the green, with big snowdrifts, and coasting down Long Hill by starlight, with going to church in the forenoon, and coming home to turkey and cranberry sauce, and a pudding in blue flames! Here there was nothing, there was nobody. There wasn't a shop within a hundred miles, and if there were, there was no money with which to buy anything. For Mr. Murtrie had come to grief in his business, losing, when all debts were paid, everything but this ranch, to which he had brought his family, and where it seemed like a new world.

At first, it had been so novel, no one thought of homesickness. Nancy herself had enjoyed as much as any one the singing of the mocking-birds at night, the flashing of the cardinal's red wings in the radiant mornings and the bubbling of his song, the fragrance of the jasmines, the beauty of the innumerable flowers, the charm of the wide landscape, the giant trees draped in their veils of gray moss; she had enjoyed hearing the boys tell about the bat-caves, with their streams of unnumbered wings going out by dark and coming in by dawn in myriads; she had enjoyed lying awake at night to hear the water gently pouring through the irrigation ditches from the *madre* ditch, and drowning all the land in its fertilizing flood to the sound of slow music; she had enjoyed watching the long flights of wild ducks; seeing a spot apparently covered with yellow flowers that suddenly turned into a flock of birds that rose and flew away. She had enjoyed the strange cactus

growths that seemed to her like things enchanted in their weird shapes by old magicians; she had enjoyed the thickets of prickly pear, the green and feathery foliage of the mesquit bushes, many of them no higher than her head, but with mighty roots stretching far and wide underground, the Indians having burned the tops in their wild raids, year after year, long ago. But now Nancy was longing for the bare branches of her old apple-tree weaving their broidery on the sky, for the young oak by the brook which held its brown leaves till spring, for the wide snow-fields, the shadows of whose drifts were blue as sapphire. She was longing to hear the bells ring out their gladness on Christmas eve and Christmas morning, for the spicy green gloom of the church, for all the happy cheer of Christmas as she had known it. Bells? There wasn't a bell within hearing; there wasn't a church, except the ruins of an old Spanish mission three or four miles distant. How could there be Christmas green where there wasn't a spruce or a fir! There was only this long, dreary prairie of the cattle-range under its burning blue sky. It was the very kingdom of loneliness. Christmas without snow, without an icicle, without whistling winds,—oh, it wasn't Christmas at all!

And then suddenly, as the angry words resounded and echoed in her mind, she asked herself what made Christmas, anyway? Certainly it wasn't the things people did. In some places they kept it with blowing of horns and burning of fire-crackers, as they did Fourth of July. Perhaps in that way they expressed

as much gladness as others did with the pealing from belfries and the rolling of organ tones. For Christmas was a time to be glad that Christ came to make all Christendom good, and blessed, and happy.

And, just as suddenly, Nancy could not help asking herself what she was doing to express gladness or to make Christmas happy. North pole or south pole, Christmas was Christmas, and it wasn't all in pleasure or all in gifts; and she got out of bed, and knelt down and said a prayer, and went to sleep in a better frame of mind.

But if it wasn't all in pleasures or all in gifts, there must be *some* gifts; and next day, Nancy set herself to thinking out the problem. It was still some time before the great holiday, and every hour must be improved.

For the first thing, she betook herself to one of the men on the range who often came about the buildings; and he found for her several huge horns, and, with his help, and taking Johnny into her confidence, they took grease and brick-dust and scraped and polished these horns till they shone almost like silver. Then the three dug for a big mesquit root and secured one, at last, that grew from a great stock; and they scraped and polished that into a very handsome piece of wood; and, having a little knack of carpentry, they fitted the enormous horns into the mesquit root, and there was a chair for any palace. It was to be their father's, and was to stand on the gallery, where, some night, the night-

blooming cereus that laced the whole front would open its slow, delicious flowers, and shed the balm of heaven about him.

They found it a little difficult to keep this secret, because they began work upon it before Mr. Murtrie went off on his hunting-trip with some friends; but after he had gone, things were easier, as the mother was not inclined to prowl about and look into everything, as the head of a house sometimes thinks necessary.

And for the mother,—they knew where some tall flat grasses grew, near a stream that was brimming at this season, and Johnny waded in and got them. Nancy plaited them into a low work-basket, and lined it with a bit of silk that had been her doll's skirt in her day of dolls. The doll, that had been religiously put away, was taken from her slumbers and furbished for Bessie's Christmas. "Why, really, it's going to be a Christmas, after all," she said.

"Only it's so queer to have it so warm," grumbled Johnny. "Winter without snowballing isn't winter!"

"Oh, I don't know," said Nancy, beginning to defend the thing she had adopted.

The man who had found the horns for her found also a little baby fox, and that was kept in great seclusion to become, on Christmas morning, a pet for Johnny; and Marnie and Nancy had great times together feeding it. He had the funniest little bark already. "Oh, we are coming along!" cried Nancy.

But there was more to be done. She remembered

that once, when her father had taken her to see the ruins of the old mission, she had observed a number of Mexican "shacks," or huts, near by. She saw the dinner of one family, which consisted of half a sweet-potato and a red pepper. But she had also seen a big cage full of canarios. And so Nancy and Johnny set out to walk over to the mission, losing their way several times, but finding it again all at once. There an Indian woman, who was about thirty years old and looked a hundred, flung her baby, which was the loveliest little harmony of brown and rose you ever saw, into her husband's arms, and, after a great deal of pantomime and dumb show, sold, for the price of the last piece of silver in Nancy's purse, a pair of the canarios in a cage made of reeds, each one an exquisite pinch of feathers, a lot of living gems, of all colors of the rainbow, blue, and yellow, and green, and purple, and red, and brown—iridescent little things, with a song like the faintest, prettiest echo of a Hartz canary's song. And there was Marnie's Christmas present settled.

But for Robby? Oh, there was the horned toad she had heard about. Robby had seen one in some show or other at home, and had longed for it. Here it was to his hand,—if she could find it. And with the help of the man who had helped her before, and who could not fancy what she wanted it for, find it she did. Robby would be delighted.

If Nancy had been born in the region, or was living in any town there, she would have found no difficulty in making Christmas presents like those she

had hitherto given; but these gifts that she found possible were unique and unlike anything she could have obtained at her old home.

And now for sweetmeats. Well, they had dried some of the luscious grapes and there were the raisins in the pantry, just oozing and crusted with sugar; and there was the barrel of molasses from the sugar-mill down on the Brazos; no one could make more delicate candy than Nancy could and did; and there had been a great harvest of pecan-nuts; and thus, so far as the stockings were concerned, Christmas had no more to ask.

The expected day was close at hand, and Nancy pictured to herself how it would all go off—how the stockings would be hung up, how Johnny would help with the chair and then be in bed before his own gift appeared, and how she would be up at the peep of dawn to go out and bring in that baby fox—the delicate, delicious, dewy dawn—and make his bed under Johnny's stocking, tying his leash to the toe, after fastening it securely to a hook in the chimney; and how she would untwist and unbind and unlace a great bunch of the roses outside that were having a late blossoming on their luxuriant growth, and bring it into the window and train it all around the room under the ceiling. It would be—well, as beautiful as the Christmas green; it couldn't be more beautiful, she said in her thoughts.

It was at this time that Mrs. Murtrie began to be a little anxious about her husband. He should have returned from his hunting-trip some days before,

and he was still absent, no one could say where. And, of course, she was conjuring up all sorts of frightful possibilities in the way of accidents, and Marnie was helping her; and Nancy herself, although ordinarily holding her father to be invulnerable, felt a degree of alarm as she thought what if he had fallen into some gulch, or lost his way, or drowned in one of the rivers that rose, after a rain in the hills, so swiftly that, in a town below, a man had been overtaken before he could get off the bridge. As for Johnny, he was for going out to find his father, if he only knew which way to go. As night fell, and it was Christmas eve, the house was full of a sort of electric tension; no one said just what every one was thinking, till suddenly Bessie broke out with a great sob, and cried: "I want my papa!" Then every one fell to comforting her, and all were furtively wiping away tears, when steps rang on the gallery, the door burst open, and the father, with his blue eyes shining out of his browned skin, and his great voice resonant, stood before them, holding an immense bird with wide-spreading wings.

"It's a wild turkey," he said, after the uproarious greetings, and as soon as they loosened their embraces. "I was resolved not to come back without a turkey for Christmas. And it's a great deal richer and sweeter than any home-made bird, as you'll see when it's roasted."

A turkey! And Nancy had but lately been bemoaning herself that the dinner would be without

a turkey. She had gone to bed, and so did not see her mother seize the wings of the wild trophy, and trim them, and run out to the kitchen to the adjacent building and dry them well in a hot oven, and later trim them again, and bind them at the base with the palms of an old kid glove and so finish for Nancy's Christmas as fine a feather fan as one could wish to wave on a hot summer afternoon.

But at last, when the house was quite still, Nancy crept out of her room and summoned Johnny to help her with the chair. Johnny was too sleepy not to be glad to be dismissed after that, and then she disposed of the presents exactly as she had planned, and wondered what the large parcel was, swinging by a string from her own stocking, and went to sleep to the tune of the song a mocking-bird sang, sweet, and strong, and joyous, in the pecan-tree outside, till a rising wind swept it away. And if you could have looked into the living-room of that bungalow next morning, you would have seen Johnny hugging his baby fox, and Bessie hugging her doll and Marnie chirping to her birds, and their mother putting spools, and needles, and scissors into her work-basket, and the father taking his ease in his big chair with its shining supports, and Nancy leisurely fanning herself, as if there were not a norther blowing outside, which, had the casements been open, would have blown the rain quite across the room. Rain? No, oh, no! For, see! look! For a wonder, the love-

liest, silveriest, soft snow was falling, which, even if it melted to-morrow, made Nancy's northern heart feel, in her southern home, the spirit of Christmas everywhere.

A BOOK FOR JERRY[1]

Sarah Addington

It seemed to Jerry that he would really die if he didn't get a book that Christmas. Here he was, eight years old, learning to read, liking to read better than almost anything else in the world, and he had no book to read from. He read at school in books furnished by somebody or other, Jerry didn't know who, but that wasn't enough. Jerry wanted a book for his very own. He wanted it big enough to carry under his arm, and small enough to put under his pillow at night. He wanted it to have stories in it about bears and St. Bernards and dragons and boys —no girls; stories, too, about snakes and explorers and boats and soldiers. He wanted the book to have red and yellow and green pictures of airplanes and lions and pirates, one picture on every page.

This was the book Jerry wanted. This was the book he dreamed of in bed at night and thought about in the daytime, the book he pretended to carry under his arm and made believe was under his pillow. But there wasn't the slightest chance of Jerry's getting that book, or any book. Indeed, Jerry would

[1] Reprinted from "Jerry Juddikins" by special permission of David McKay Company, publishers, and the author.

have been ashamed to mention the word "book" at home. People don't talk airily about blue-and-gold books when their mothers don't have enough breakfast and their fathers don't have enough supper and nobody in the whole family ever has enough dinner, even on Sunday.

And that was the appalling state of affairs at the Juddikins'. Nobody ever mentioned it, but there it was. They hadn't enough food, they hadn't enough fire, they hadn't enough clothes. There were five Juddikins: Mr. Juddikins, Mrs. Juddikins, Jerry Juddikins, the baby Juddikins, and Mutt Juddikins, who, though he was only a dog and, as dogs go, not of high social position, yet was a highly important member of the Juddikins family. He was a mutt dog, the Juddikins frankly called him Mutt, yet this dog was far from a mutt at heart. Indeed, he had a thoroughbred soul, such as some of your blue-blooded aristocratic dogs never dream of having. He never whined when he was hungry, like the fussy little Pomeranian next door. He didn't need a silk pillow to sleep on, like the lazy Pekingese across the street. Not much. Mutt was a real sport. He took what he got, which wasn't much, but it was always all that the Juddikins could give him; bread and gravy, potatoes sometimes, even a bone now and then, a skimpy, dry bone, to be sure, but none the less a bone. Mutt took these and was grateful and happy, even put on airs as if it were a feast that the Juddikins had set before him.

For Mutt was not only a sport, he was also a swell.

He carried his tail at the most elegant angle. He picked up his feet with style and dignity. His were drawing-room manners. He had shameful ancestors; his grandfather on his mother's side had been a mere roustabout dog, one of those villains who spend their lives fighting and stealing and cheating man and beast alike. Mutt remembered him well; he had died in a brawl which was the talk of the alley for days. Then there was Mutt's grandmother on his father's side, a dissolute old dog who ate a cat a day when she was home, and who, when she wasn't home, wandered abroad pillaging and plundering like a very pirate among dogs. She dined on garbage and slept in ash cans. Mutt's own mother was far from a lady, his father was a brute, and their home life was deplorable.

And yet along came Mutt, their descendant, a gentleman if not a scholar, a dog well-mannered, refined, gallant, heroic. The last of a long line of ruffians, thieves, bullies and traitors, Mutt was a cavalier among dogs, and he lived with the Juddikins and was the very center of their small and humble universe.

Some people said the Juddikins ought not to keep Mutt: they were too poor. But, as Mrs. Juddikins said, when you're poor you need a dog the most of all, and as for giving up Mutt, rich or poor, the Juddikins would as soon have considered giving up the baby, I do believe. Of course the baby was very sweet and cunning, but Mutt was far more intelligent, and one thing he didn't do, he didn't swallow button-

hooks and hairbrushes all day long, as the foolish Juddikins baby tried to do.

The Juddikins would have been a very happy family, then, if only they hadn't been so poor. But they were poor. There was hardly any money at all in Mr. Juddikins' pocket, none at all in Mrs. Juddikins' pocket, less than none in the brown box on the mantelpiece, for there, where the money used to be, were now only bills. Bills for the rent of the Juddikins' tiny house, bills for the doctor—for once the baby really swallowed part of the hairbrush, and old Doctor Jollyman had to come running and fish out the bristles.

It was all because Mr. Juddikins didn't have a job. Fathers have to have jobs, it seems, to keep families going, and Mr. Juddikins didn't have one, so his family wasn't kept going very well. It scared Mr. Juddikins half to death sometimes to think that the whole family depended on him like this. Mrs. Juddikins, Jerry Juddikins, the baby Juddikins, Mutt—all had stomachs to fill, all had bodies to be warmed at the fire, and this not to mention Mr. Juddikins, who was hungry and cold himself all the time.

Every morning Mr. Juddikins would start out to look for a job. First he would rise early and call everybody. "Get up, mother! Get up, Jerry! Get up, baby!" Mutt was the only one who didn't have to be told to get up. Then Mr. Juddikins would bustle around and make a fire, oh, a very small one, and while Mrs. Juddikins was making the tea, oh, a very

small pot, Mr. Juddikins would put on his clean collar and his stringy black tie, and sing as he looked at himself in the mirror. Mr. Juddikins was, you see, of a cheerful disposition. If he had not been, he could never have sung as he looked at himself in the mirror. Mr. Juddikins would then take his tea. He made dreadful faces over the tea, for he didn't like it without milk and the Juddikins had no milk, except the baby, who had nothing else, unless you count the bristles.

After drinking tea and making faces for a while, Mr. Juddikins would put on his shabby hat and his skimpy overcoat, kiss them all around and go off. In one pocket he carried a bit of lunch, in the other a letter of recommendation. In his heart Mr. Juddikins bore a strange and thrilling hope: Today he would get the job, and henceforth all would be rosy and jolly for the Juddikins family. But somehow today was never the day, and every night Mr. Juddikins would come home tired and discouraged, his cheerful eyes clouded, his smile gone, his perky tie sagging at a most dejected angle. It was all very bad, and Jerry felt so sorry for his father. Book indeed! What kind of boy would he be to mention book at a time like this?

Jerry went to school on Peppermint Place. It was a lovely school, where canaries sang in little glittering cages and geraniums bloomed like red soldiers in straight rows at the windows, and where in winter a fire boomed in a big, deep fireplace, and in summer the peppermint trees flung white-blossomed

arms in at the windows. Were they really peppermint trees? I confess I don't know. The grown-ups said not, and called them lindens and catalpas and chestnuts. But the children said they were: else why should the square be called Peppermint Place? Grown-ups have a tiresome way of being right about things like that, yet why should a square be called Peppermint Place if the trees aren't peppermint trees? Moreover, the children said that if you went to the square at midnight the flowers were peppermint, and they said they could smell them in the early morning when they first got to school—a left-over, faint, but delicious smell that was nothing if it was not peppermint blossoms washed over with midnight dew. Nobody had ever been at Peppermint Place at midnight, so nobody could really deny what the children said. So I am inclined to believe that for once the grown-ups were wrong, and that the trees were really peppermint—at midnight anyway.

From nine to ten the children at this school read and did arithmetic problems. Jerry had struggled from nine to ten many mornings with the queer marks in his primer, until, lo, one morning he found he could read—all as sudden and surprising as that. From ten to eleven they sang and drank cocoa and played games around the fire. From eleven to twelve they took naps, then read some more, and looked up cities and rivers on the big globe over by the red soldiers in the window, and wrote on the blackboard. From twelve to one they played in the garden behind the school. This was a special garden, just for

children. It had signs up like these: "Parents and Dogs Not Allowed"; "Please Walk on the Grass"; "Trespassing Allowed." And at one o'clock the children went home.

Jerry loved school. He loved the reading and the cocoa and the geraniums on parade, though he did wonder sometimes about those geraniums. Didn't they get tired of just being dressed up and parading, and long to break ranks and have a good fight? Even toy soldiers have wars; these were such peaceful soldiers. But you can't fight if you don't have any enemies, and the geranium soldiers didn't. Everybody loved them; consequently their life was one long peace. Jerry liked the boys at school, too—Peter the Little, and Johnnie O'Day, and the Bumpus twins who had such interesting pockets, fishing worms and marbles and snake skins and arrows and tops and kite strings and magnets, all in one inviting jumble. He even liked the butterflies on top of the girls' heads, pink and brown and red ribbons that perched there and looked always ready to fly.

But he didn't like the girls. He simply couldn't stand the girls. Girls swished their skirts, for one thing, the important silly creatures; swished them into the room and down the aisles, and even when they got safely into their seats they swished and fidgeted and squirmed around, spread out those skirts in wide circles around them, and patted them down in such an utterly silly way. They snickered, too, all the time. Hee, hee, hee! Tee, hee, hee! Jerry could positively

hear them in his sleep; he could see them in the dark, putting up small hands before their faces, hee-heeing and tee-heeing behind them, and rolling foolish eyes around. Also, they were cowards and cravens—squealed at the sight of a spider, couldn't climb a tree worth a cent, sniffled when their feelings were hurt. A detestable tribe, girls!

Jerry used to wonder if his baby sister would grow up to be one of them, swishing her skirts and giggling and sniffling. Most likely. Anybody that would eat hairbrushes would no doubt grow up just as silly. And he used to wonder, too, how it was that women like his mother and the teacher, such utterly lovely people as they now were, had ever been just girls. Could his teacher really have been like these? Did she never throw a ball right, or climb a tree decently, or carry a toad in her pocket? Oh, yes, toads! The girls said they made warts. Fancy that, if you can. Warts! And supposing toads did make warts, who cared? No, Jerry couldn't endure girls, and that was why he didn't want a single girl in his whole book when he got it, if he ever did get it. A world without girls was impossible, it seemed; there were such hordes and swarms of them; but a book without girls was entirely feasible, and that was the kind of book Jerry wanted.

And then one day, two weeks before Christmas, it suddenly began to look as though Jerry might get his book after all. It was the teacher's idea, and when she had suggested it Jerry wondered why in the world he hadn't thought of such a simple thing.

The teacher said: "Now today we're going to write our letters to Santa Claus. Peter, you pass the pencils, please, and Katinka may distribute the papers. And you must all tell Santa just what you want, and don't forget commas and periods. Santa Claus is very partial to commas and periods. Last week Katinka wrote a whole page without a single comma. I can't think what made her."

Katinka, who was passing papers blushed guiltily, and Jerry, though he hated girls, felt a little sorry for her. Katinka was hardly as odious as most girls. She had reddish short curls, and she wore green butterflies on them. She was fattish, her face was usually sticky from lollipops, her aprons were always torn and dirty, but even she switched herself around a good deal; couldn't help it, being a girl, Jerry supposed. And once she had stopped in front of Jerry's house to pat Mutt with a grimy, affectionate paw.

Well, Jerry wrote his letter. He knew precisely what he wanted. So he told Santa Claus all about it, told him about the dragons and pirates and lions and soldiers he wanted in the book, mentioned the blue cover, explained the size, called Santa's attention to his record as a good boy all year, and stated that there must be no girls in the book. Then he went over the letter, scattering commas and periods lavishly in every sentence, and signed his name, Jerry Juddikins, 123 Whippoorwill Road. As Jerry watched it go up the chimney, he felt a tug at his heart he had never quite felt before; he would get his

precious book on Christmas morning; Santa Claus would see to that.

Benjamin Bookfellow came into his workshop the next morning rubbing his hands and telling himself what a really fine job he had in the world, anyway. To live in the North Country with Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus and all the toymakers, to write books all year long for children's Christmas stockings—what could be finer than that, asked Benjamin Bookfellow of himself. Most of all, he thought, he liked this cozy room of his where the sun shone in so gayly and the Plot Tree, thick with plots for stories, reared its beautiful branches over his head. Benjamin Bookfellow was very happy that morning as he settled down to Page Twenty-four of "Chief Thundercloud's Revenge," a book he was writing for a little tomboy of a girl, named Katinka, who liked Indian stories almost as much as she liked lollipops, which was saying a good deal.

Pretty soon Hickety-Stickety came in. Hickety-Stickety was the postmaster of the Claus establishment. He had a letter in his hand and he looked worried.

"Santy Claus sent ye this here," he began. "It's from a boy as goes to Peppermint Place school. He wants a queer thing, he do. He wants a book as hasn't got no girls in it."

Benjamin Bookfellow reached out for the letter. "Pyrits," it said, "soldieres, draggens"; all that was easy. "no, girls, in it Santa Claus not; one." A book without girls in it? Benjamin Bookfellow had

never heard of such a thing. Girls were absolutely necessary to books. Dragons had to eat them, knights had to rescue them; how could you possibly have a book without a girl in it?

And yet maybe the Plot Tree would have that kind of story on it after all. Benjamin reached up and picked off a luscious fruit. He opened it carefully and out fell the plot, a little round ball with words written all over it. He read it hastily. No, here was a girl right off, a girl and a gnome and a prince, quite obviously a fairy story.

He pulled down another plot, then more plots and more plots and more plots, cut them open and took out the round ball and still not a single story without a girl in it, just as he had feared. Poor Benjamin Bookfellow! His face was as long as your arm.

At supper that night in Santa Claus' dining room, when Benjamin and Hickety-Stickety and the Twelve Toymakers were all at table with the Clauses, Santa Claus said first thing: "Well, Bookfellow, and did you find a story without a girl in it?"

"I didn't, sir," replied Benjamin sadly. "I took off every single plot from the tree, and they all had girls in them."

Santa Claus' rosy chops fell. "Have you called in the Authors, Bookfellow?" Santa Claus wanted to know.

Benjamin Bookfellow knew what was coming. The Authors sometimes wrote books to help Benjamin when he got crowded with work.

"No, sir, I haven't yet."

"Then do send for them immediately," said Santa Claus. "We must get Jerry Juddikins' book, you know, at any cost."

The next morning Santa Claus sent the reindeer down to the edge of the North Country to meet the Authors, while Benjamin Bookfellow fidgeted and fussed around his study.

At last they came, a whole sleighful—stylish authors, down-at-the-heel authors, shy authors, important authors, authors with fur overcoats, authors with no overcoats, lady authors twittering, authors, authors, authors. But the interview was short. Not a single author could even imagine a book without a girl in it, much less produce one.

"I give it up," said Benjamin Bookfellow. "Jerry Juddikins will just have to take a regular book, a book with girls in it, and try to be contented with it."

So he set to work on all the other books he had to finish before Christmas.

Whereupon he discovered, to his horror and dismay, that there wasn't a plot in the place. He had plucked them yesterday and laid them on his work table, and now they were gone, every single one of them, gone. Benjamin Bookfellow, in great agitation, looked high and low for his plots, in every corner and crevice. He moved the furniture and looked behind the pictures.

And then Benjamin Bookfellow knew the worst. The Authors had stolen his plots, and now he

couldn't write his Christmas books. With a groan Benjamin Bookfellow sank in his chair.

Great was the sorrow of jolly old Santa Claus and great was the sorrow of Mrs. Claus and the Twelve Toymakers when they learned the dreadful news. No Christmas books for children! What a terrible thing!

Well, there they were, Santa Claus and all his helpers, with Christmas not two weeks off, and no books for children's stockings. Oh, there were some books of course. Benjamin Bookfellow had been writing books all year long, but there was no book for Katinka, for hers was only half finished; and there was no book for Jerry Juddikins, who didn't want anything but a book for Christmas.

Santa Claus thought maybe the Plot Tree would grow some new plots for the rest of the books, but Benjamin Bookfellow said no. There were some buds on the trees, but you can't expect buds to be fruit in a week.

"Perhaps if you watered it an extra lot the plots would grow," said Santa Claus at dinner next day.

"Perhaps if you pruned it—" began Toymaker Number Five, but that was no good either; the Plot Tree had been beautifully pruned just a few weeks before and now was a marvel of perfect branches and healthy sap.

"Did you ever try using a little imagination on it?" asked Toymaker Number Eleven timidly. Everybody stared.

"What's imagination?" asked Hickety-Stickety.

"Why—" commenced Santa Claus and stopped.

"Why—" began Mrs. Claus and stopped.

"Why—" Benjamin Bookfellow started and stopped.

So Toymaker Number Eleven finished up for them.

"Why, Hickety-Stickety," he said in a little thin voice, "if you think up a lovely story that never happened, but is better than anything that ever did happen, that's imagination. There's a spring," he added dreamily, "where the waters of imagination grow. I know where that spring is."

"You do?" everybody at the table cried.

"Yes," answered Toymaker Number Eleven, still in the same musing voice. "It's in the deep woods down between green banks. Even in winter the banks are green; the snow melts when it touches them. A hawthorn tree almost hides the spring from view, but at night when the moon is shining you can see the water quite plainly; it's silver and black and it sings a little song."

"Well," boomed Santa Claus in a big voice, "that solves the whole thing. To-night we'll get some of that wonderful water, and sprinkle it on the Plot Tree and then it will burst forth with plots and Bookfellow can write his books."

Which is just what happened. When the moon came up that night Benjamin Bookfellow, led by Toymaker Number Eleven, went in the deep woods down to the green banks behind the hawthorn,

scooped up a pailful of the wonderful water and took it back to the Plot Tree. At the first sprinkle the buds began to flower; at the next sprinkle the flowers bloomed into green fruit; at the last sprinkle the green fruit turned yellow like oranges and seemed ready to burst. Three sprinkles, and the buds were full-grown plots, ready to be nipped off by Benjamin Bookfellow and used for children's books. A wonderful thing, imagination. Nobody ever need scoff at it again.

But still Jerry Juddikins' book was not forthcoming, for even the new plots all had girls in them. Jerry didn't know he wouldn't get his book of course. He didn't dream that in all the store of Santa's treasures there wouldn't be a book without a girl in it. So he was very happy.

It was in the evening of two days before Christmas, and already the air of Christmas was abroad. The air crackled with Christmas, the windows of people's houses flaunted Christmas, the snow crunched with Christmas in every crunch, and everywhere there was that tingling feel of Christmas. Even Mutt had Christmas in his bones and had gone off on an adventure, tail up, nose up, barking with Christmas joy. And then to cap the climax, Mr. Juddikins came home with a job in his pocket! Oh, such joy in the Juddikins' house! They were all quite delirious with it.

They wished Mutt would come back though. They knew how happy he would be when they told him. Mr. Juddikins hurried out and bought a fat bone for

such a bone as Mutt had dreamed of all his life they had never yet set teeth upon. They unbolted the door—the more quickly to open it when Mutt came back. Then they sat down and waited, the bone on a plate, the door unlatched.

But Mutt did not come back. Six o'clock came, and half-past six and seven. Eight o'clock came, and half-past eight and nine. The Juddikins went out into the snow-covered garden calling, "Mutt, Mutt, Mutt." They went up and down Whippoorwill Road hunting and calling and searching. But he was gone and they sat around the fire, Mr. Juddikins and Mrs. Juddikins and Jerry, with terror and ache in their hearts. Even the baby looked sad as she slept in her high chair.

Then, all at once, as they sat there, they heard steps up the walk; not dog steps but human steps, a big, long stride like a man's and a little short hippety-hop like a girl's. A knock came at the door, a big rap from a man's hand, a little tattoo from a girl's hand. Mr. Juddikins looked fearfully at Mrs. Juddikins, and Jerry looked at them both. Here was somebody to tell them Mutt was dead. They couldn't move.

The knock came again.

"Go," said Mrs. Juddikins to Mr. Juddikins.

Mr. Juddikins went, and in tumbled a bundle of red curls, sticky lips, smeared hands, torn coat. It was Katinka. At her heels followed a tall black overcoat with a kind face; Katinka's father.

"He's all right, Jerry!" cried Katinka falling

into the room. "Mutt's all right! He's just a little hurt, and he's asleep now by our fire. I wrapped his leg up and gave him an enormous supper."

Katinka's father spoke next, smiling kindly. "Your dog had a little accident, Mr. Juddikins," he said.

Accident! Jerry turned white, and Katinka struck in again. "But he's quite all right, Jerry. He gave me the sweetest looks when I was fixing his leg, and we'll bring him home in the morning."

Then Katinka's father explained to the anxious and bewildered Juddikins what had happened. "It was about seven o'clock," he said, "and the butcher boy was hurrying his horse down the road, to get home to his supper, I suppose. We heard the horse; he was going like lightning. Katinka was in the yard, and the next thing my wife and I knew was a noise in the road. Katinka was screaming, a dog was yelping. It was your dog, Mr. Juddikins. He had run in front of the cart, and Katinka had run in front of it, too, and had snatched the dog from the horses' feet." He looked at Katinka with the proudest eyes. "She really saved him from being killed, I think."

Katinka had saved Mutt from being killed! That little girl with her sticky hands had run right under the horses' hoofs and brought their Mutt to safety. The Juddikins couldn't speak. Their hearts seemed to choke into their very mouths, but they looked at her as if she were something holy.

Katinka started for the door. "It's all right now," she said. "I wanted you to know. Oh, he's a darling

dog, Jerry. And his leg is only cut a little because I had to throw him, and he hit the curb.''

''And weren't you hurt?'' asked Mr. Juddikins, the first word any of them had spoken.

''Me? Oh, no. I never get hurt,'' answered Katinka loftily, and made for the door.

The next morning Santa Claus received the most surprising letter. He thought it was too late for Christmas letters, but here came one on this very day before Christmas. It was from Jerry Juddikins, and it was written in the wildest haste. You could tell that by the handwriting. It said: *Dear Santa Claus: I, love girls now, please, please. put a girl just like Katinka in my book,.*

So Benjamin Bookfellow wrote all morning and all afternoon, a beautiful blue book with pirates and dragons and soldiers in it and a heroine who was just like Katinka, and that night Santa Claus took it to Whippoorwill Road and put it in Jerry's stocking.

And every day after that Jerry carried his precious book under his arm, and every night he slept with it under his pillow, and he was the happiest boy in the whole world and Katinka was his best friend.

THE BISHOP AND THE CARDINAL[1]

George Madden Martin

The spread of the spruce-tree at its base, where its branches rested on the snow in the bishop's yard, was thirty feet. The apex, to which the branches mounted in slanting tiers, was fifty feet above the ground.

The December afternoon was cold—not much above zero. Weather of that kind was most unusual in a region so far south. The sky was gray. Now and then a few big snow-flakes came silently down to join the white brotherhood that had already fallen a foot deep on the level and more than two feet deep in the drifts.

The shrubs about the yard looked like snow hillocks; the round bushes were cone-shaped, the branching ones were wreathed. Not a berry or seed-vessel or grass-spear or weed-tuft was anywhere visible.

In these bleak surroundings, a valiant and energetic gentleman in the scarlet cassock and biretta of a cardinal—a cardinal with wings and beak and feathers, you understand—was darting from point

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to point of the big evergreen, from apex to branch, from branch to apex, a gorgeous splash of color against the clear green of the boughs and the blue-white of the snow.

The spruce, with the flitting cardinal on its boughs, stood at the side of the bishop's grounds between his slate-roofed and ivy-clad house and the brick orphan asylum.

The bishop's bedroom was on the same side of the house as the spruce, and just now the bachelor bishop himself was at a window of the square bay of this chamber, looking out upon his grounds and the big evergreen in the bleak and wintry setting. He was just becoming acquainted with the spruce and his side yard.

The robe that he wore at the moment had less of the episcopal dignity than that of the cardinal in the evergreen; the bishop's was a gray-and-black dressing-gown, and it was tied about his body with a gray-and-black cord and tassels.

His expression, or what could be seen of it,—for this square-featured, clean-shaven bishop wore a green celluloid shade over his eyes,—was rueful. It was the first Christmas after his arrival from a distant state to be head of this Southern diocese. And behold, three weeks after his coming, here he was—ill with the measles!

He was in his venerable predecessor's house, and that was why the stately spruce and the cardinal were new to him.

The dwelling, in its old grounds, with a small,

slate-roofed church to the left of it and the asylum to the right of it, stood on the car-line a little way out from the chief city of the diocese. The wife of the late bishop had owned it long before trolley-cars were dreamed of; had built the church and the asylum, and given them to her husband's diocese; had died, and left the dwelling to her husband. When, within a year, he followed her, he had left the place as an episcopal residence for his successors.

The old bishop's pensioned servants remained, integral parts of the institution. Neither a new broom nor a new bishop must sweep too clean. Even one who has authority, when he finds himself among the old associations and traditions and institutions of a sedate community, must move slowly.

The bishop found the household of which he was bachelor proprietor somewhat dreary. There was old Mrs. Dyer, the housekeeper, a distant relative of the old bishop's, gold-spectacled, tall and spare. There was old Aunty Sally, the colored cook, silver-spectacled, short and fat. There was Thomas, the colored coachman and gardener, gray-haired, and, for the time, confined to his room over the tool-house by rheumatism. There was old white Tim, the general factotum and furnace-tender of the asylum, the rectory and the church; he had gone to town that morning for his Christmas purchases, and so far, at four o'clock in the afternoon, had not returned. In this venerable company the new bishop felt a mere infant in arms, an infant with measles!—the more

so, because from the beginning he had refused to have a trained nurse, and had put himself into the hands of Mrs. Dyer and Aunt Sally.

The house overflowed with flowers and delicacies that his good people, few of whom he yet knew, had sent him. But to-day as he stood at his window and gazed out on the winter scene he was feeling lonely and a little aggrieved. No doubt it was the bleakness of the day and the nearness of the Christmas season under the present conditions of captivity, that depressed him.

In a direct line across from him, at no great distance, stood the asylum; its side windows looked on his own, and both sets of windows looked upon the spruce-tree. As he had barely established himself in his present residence when he took the measles, he had had no chance to become acquainted with the asylum, or its affairs, or its inmates.

Had that little red-feathered fellow out there on the snow-clad evergreen-tree gone crazy? The bishop came from the city, and knew neither the spruce nor the cardinal by name. The cardinal was dipping and rising about the tree, fluttering and darting, now here, now there, from branch to twig, from twig to branch.

"And always as if he had his red-ringed small eye on the gallery," said the bishop, who meant by "gallery," himself at the window.

Just then the cardinal left the big spruce-tree altogether, and dropped to the snow-mantled clump of spirea nearer the house. Immediately there ap-

peared upon the branches of the spruce two flashing, swaggering, top-knotted blue jays.

The cardinal flew from the spirea; down from the spruce dropped the jays to the bush that he had left; and almost at once two brown and speckled sapsuckers perched upon the branches of the evergreen.

The bishop looked on with interest. Almost parrot-like the cardinal was clinging with the coral-red claws of his coral-red legs to the sharp edge of the window-sill; his red head and coral beak were held sidewise, and his beady eyes were upturned sharply. Behind him was a world that was cold and desolate and threatening. The white flakes were falling persistently.

Then the bell of the bishop's telephone rang. The doctor who twice a day came in to see him and cheer him up had forbidden him to use his eyes or to do any hard work or to see his secretary, who had not had the measles; but he could use his ears and his tongue. So he had had the telephone brought into his room and set upon a table, and he talked daily with his dean at the cathedral in town, with various members of his clergy, and with other official persons.

He turned from the window at the ring, and lifted the receiver.

"Bishop Herbert at the telephone. Yes?" said he, and his voice was deep and genial and sonorous.

"He is telling you that he is hungry, please," said a voice, small and anxious.

"Who is hungry? Who is this speaking?"

"The cardinal-bird on your window-sill. This is Gwinie."

"Why should he be telling me? And who is Gwinie? And how does she know a cardinal-bird is on my window-sill and hungry?"

"I can see him there. I live across from you at the asylum. He is hungry because I can't come over and put crumbs on his bird-tray; and it's snowed three days now."

"Where is his bird-tray? And why can't you come?"

"It's there by the spruce-tree. You can see it from your window. It's a tray on a stake in the ground. The other bishop kept it full. I can't come over and fill it the way I've been doing because I've got the measles."

"Is that so?" said the bishop. "So have I. Is there anybody over there who can come and fill it? You cannot expect me to ask Mrs. Dyer to wade out there in a blizzard. And old Aunt Sally would go under in the drifts."

"The doctor told us you had measles," said Gwinie. "You took them first; then we did. He's just gone. He said I might come to the telephone and call up, and tell whoever answered about the cardinal. He said he didn't want to have my measles worried in. We've all got them. There isn't anybody who can come. Tim, he's never got home from town. We've put crumbs out, but the birds don't know it, and the snow keeps covering the crumbs up. We haven't any tray over here."

"H'm!" said the bishop. "And how can I put crumbs on the sills of French windows? They open outward, you know. What? Hold on there, Gwinie!"

"I have to go. Miss Lowry, she's called three times. But I'll think."

The bishop hung up his receiver, and returned to the window to survey the situation in the light of what he had just learned. The cardinal had advanced boldly on the sill, and now hopped back and forth on it, with his bright eye fixed on the occupant of the room.

The jays and sapsuckers were on the spirea together, and a dozen small, crested birds with brown backs and slate-colored breasts were flitting anxiously about the spruce-tree. Across the open space, at an asylum window, was a little girl, flattening her nose against the pane. She was wrapped in a heavy blanket, and she wore a shade!

Was it Gwinie? She saw him. The flattened nose drew back, and its owner waved a hand. It *was* Gwinie. Suddenly she turned, as if something had compelled her attention in the room behind her. And then she disappeared. The bishop felt a pang of loneliness.

Ten minutes passed while he wondered what he could do. He put the question to the cardinal himself on the sill: How could either of them ask fat little old Aunt Sally to wade out through the big drifts to that tray? Then the telephone rang again.

"It's Gwinie. Miss Lowry says I may speak one minute. It's about Mr. Blythe. He takes the orders

from the asylum for Santy Claus every year. We tell him what we want most, and he puts it down, and we get it. This year the doctor had to take the orders for him because of the measles. So I asked the doctor to-day, if he saw Mr. Blythe, to get him to ask Santy to see to the birds till I get over the measles. And Mr. Blythe just called up to say he will telephone Santy direct, himself, about tending to them."

It is to be presumed that when "Santy" received the message, he acted promptly. No doubt he knew as well as Gwinie did—although the bishop did not know—that even in the South a starving cardinal compelled to endure the rigors of a night with the thermometer at zero would be a little scarlet corpse on the snow by morning. Before the early dusk quite closed in, the grocer's delivery boy appeared in the bishop's side yard. He took off his cap to the dignitary at the window, tramped knee-deep out to the bird-tray, and emptied his pockets and the contents of a paper bag on the tray. Then he lifted his cap again to the figure at the window, and departed.

The door of the bishop's room opened, and Mrs. Dyer appeared, followed by Aunt Sally, who bore the patient's supper. The women stirred the open fire, brushed the hearth, drew the curtains, and lighted the lamp. They pulled the table up near the blaze, laid the white cloth upon it, and arranged the contents of the tray.

"Creamed oysters, beefsteak, rolls, waffles, coffee, quince preserves? Good gracious, Mrs. Dyer, do I, a patient, dare to eat all that? Very well, then,

since my friend the cardinal has his supper also, outside. But you do not know about that. And, one moment, Mrs. Dyer, before you and Aunt Sally go; who is Mr. Blythe?"

"He goes by heah ev'y mornin' to the trolley. He's one o' those heah pink-colored young men," said Aunt Sally.

"He's a general favorite," said Mrs. Dyer. "He lives with an aunt up on the hill."

"He sells money at one o' these heah banks. The bishop he bought his'n f'om him. Got it ev'y Sat'day reg'lar foh to pay us'en off all roun'."

"He thinks a great deal of Christmas," said Mrs. Dyer. "I hear he is as disappointed as the children at the asylum that there will be no tree this year because of the measles."

Thanks to Mr. Blythe's fortunate telephone connection, Santa Claus continued his useful work. When the bishop got up the next day—none too early, to be sure—more snow had fallen, but the tray was swept clean of it and heaped with a fresh meal; and the birds had gathered round in dozens. Moreover, on the spruce-tree above the tray hung a placard; it was white, with large black letters, and it was visible to both sets of windows that looked upon the yard:

To His Grace The Cardinal, And Other Tenants. Please Take Notice. This Tree is Preëmpted For The Christmas Season.

S. Claus.

The cold weather held; that evening the grocer's

boy appeared again, and once more emptied his pockets and a paper bag on the birds' tray. And the next morning Santy or one of his emissaries had again swept the tray and refilled it. On the snow-draped and trailing spruce hung a second placard. It was more elaborately printed than the first one had been, and touches of holiday scarlet relieved the black of its letters.

In the asylum, a dozen small faces now appeared at the windows where one small child had flattened her nose against the pane two days before. The children were all wrapped in blankets, and wore green shades over their eyes. This is what they read on the placard:

To His Grace The Cardinal, And His Friends, Near And Far. Please Take Notice. Gifts will be Ready for Distribution from this Tree To-morrow, Christmas Day in the Morning.

S. Claus.

The presents *were* ready for distribution when that blessed morning dawned, snow-bound and cold and still. There were many stories circulated as to how and when the work had been done.

One story was that among the agents whom S. Claus had found it necessary to call upon for aid in the work were the grocer's boy and Mr. Blythe.

Some persons said that it could not have been done without the help of the hook and ladder from the engine-house two miles away. Others were convinced that unofficial ladders and orchard-pruning implements had done it.

Whatever the truth of the matter is, the orphan asylum certainly knew nothing about it, for that was wrapped in measles, and could not have peeped. As for the bishop, not for worlds would he have done such a thing.

However, Mr. S. Claus and his friends did achieve it, and when Christmas day dawned, clear and crisp and cold, the bishop and the asylum and Mrs. Dyer and Aunt Sally gazed out upon a transformed spruce-tree.

Everything was on it that should be on a tree for hungry birds—and more. For besides cranberries in strings, pop-corn in festoons, grain in gold and scarlet cornucopias, ginger-bread men, red apples, tallow candles, half loaves of bread, biscuits, there were many things that were there not to be eaten, but to make a glitter.

His grace the cardinal, a scarlet splash against the winter blue sky, was poised upon the very topmost black tip of the glorious old evergreen. And not only the two jays, but a dozen other handsome and noisy jays, as well as the speckled sapsuckers and many smaller birds, hung in mid-air about the branches, rapt and almost motionless. As the vested choir from the choir-room that adjoined the asylum crossed the yard through the brick cloister for the seven-o'clock service at the little church, they sang with hearty voices:

"O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth!

And praises sing to God, the King,
And peace to men on earth."

The bishop and Gwinie and the many little children of the asylum, all warmly wrapped in big blankets, gazed out on the scene through their frosty windows; and among those marching in the choir through the cloister were Mr. Blythe and the grocer's boy, robed and beaming, and singing most heartily of all.

A STORY OF THE CHRIST-CHILD[1]

A German legend for Christmas Eve as told by *Elizabeth Harrison*

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, on the night before Christmas, a little child was wandering all alone through the streets of a great city. There were many people on the street, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, and even gray-haired grandfathers and grandmothers, all of whom were hurrying home with bundles of presents for each other and for their little ones. Fine carriages rolled by, express wagons rattled past, even old carts were pressed into service, and all things seemed in a hurry and glad with expectation of the coming Christmas morning.

From some of the windows bright lights were already beginning to stream until it was almost as bright as day. But the little child seemed to have no home, and wandered about listlessly from street to street. No one took any notice of him except perhaps Jack Frost, who bit his bare toes and made the ends of his fingers tingle. The north wind, too, seemed to notice the child, for it blew against him

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and pierced his ragged garments through and through, causing him to shiver with cold. Home after home he passed, looking with longing eyes through the windows, in upon the glad, happy children, most of whom were helping to trim the Christmas trees for the coming morrow.

"Surely," said the child to himself, "where there is so much gladness and happiness, some of it may be for me." So with timid steps he approached a large and handsome house. Through the windows, he could see a tall and stately Christmas tree already lighted. Many presents hung upon it. Its green boughs were trimmed with gold and silver ornaments. Slowly he climbed up the broad steps and gently rapped at the door. It was opened by a large man-servant. He had a kindly face, although his voice was deep and gruff. He looked at the little child for a moment, then sadly shook his head and said, "Go down off the steps. There is no room here for such as you." He looked sorry as he spoke; possibly he remembered his own little ones at home, and was glad that they were not out in this cold and bitter night. Through the open door a bright light shone, and the warm air, filled with fragrance of the Christmas pine, rushed out from the inner room and greeted the little wanderer with a kiss. As the child turned back into the cold and darkness, he wondered why the footman had spoken thus, for surely, thought he, those little children would love to have another companion join them in their joyous Christmas festival. But the little children inside did

not even know that he had knocked at the door.

The street grew colder and darker as the child passed on. He went sadly forward, saying to himself, "Is there no one in all this great city who will share the Christmas with me?" Farther and farther down the street he wandered, to where the homes were not so large and beautiful. There seemed to be little children inside of nearly all the houses. They were dancing and frolicking about. Christmas trees could be seen in nearly every window, with beautiful dolls and trumpets and picture-books and balls and tops and other dainty toys hung upon them. In one window the child noticed a little lamb made of soft white wool. Around its neck was tied a red ribbon. It had evidently been hung on the tree for one of the children. The little stranger stopped before this window and looked long and earnestly at the beautiful things inside, but most of all was he drawn toward the white lamb. At last creeping up to the window-pane, he gently tapped upon it. A little girl came to the window and looked out into the dark street where the snow had begun to fall. She saw the child, but she only frowned and shook her head and said, "Go away and come some other time. We are too busy to take care of you now." Back into the dark, cold streets he turned again. The wind was whirling past him and seemed to say, "Hurry on, hurry on, we have no time to stop. 'Tis Christmas Eve and everybody is in a hurry to-night."

Again and again the little child rapped softly at door or window-pane. At each place he was refused

admission. One mother feared he might have some ugly disease which her darlings would catch; another father said he had only enough for his own children and none to spare for beggars. Still another told him to go home where he belonged, and not to trouble other folks.

The hours passed; later grew the night, and colder grew the wind, and darker seemed the street. Farther and farther the little one wandered. There was scarcely any one left upon the street by this time, and the few who remained did not seem to see the child, when suddenly ahead of him there appeared a bright, single ray of light. It shone through the darkness into the child's eyes. He looked up smilingly and said, "I will go where the small light beckons, perhaps they will share their Christmas with me."

Hurrying past all the other houses, he soon reached the end of the street and went straight up to the window from which the light was streaming. It was a poor, little, low house, but the child cared not for that. The light seemed still to call him in. From what do you suppose the light came? Nothing but a tallow candle which had been placed in an old cup with a broken handle, in the window, as a glad token of Christmas Eve. There was neither curtain nor shade to the small, square window and as the little child looked in he saw standing upon a neat wooden table a branch of a Christmas tree. The room was plainly furnished but it was very clean. Near the fireplace sat a lovely faced mother with a little two-

year-old on her knee and an older child beside her. The two children were looking into their mother's face and listening to a story. She must have been telling them a Christmas story, I think. A few bright coals were burning in the fireplace, and all seemed light and warm within.

The little wanderer crept closer and closer to the window-pane. So sweet was the mother's face, so loving seemed the little children, that at last he took courage and tapped gently, very gently on the door. The mother stopped talking, the little children looked up. "What was that, mother?" asked the little girl at her side. "I think it was some one tapping on the door," replied the mother. "Run as quickly as you can and open it, dear, for it is a bitter cold night to keep any one waiting in this storm." "Oh, mother, I think it was the bough of the tree tapping against the window-pane," said the little girl. "Do please go on with our story." Again the little wanderer tapped upon the door. "My child, my child," exclaimed the mother, rising, "that certainly was a rap on the door. Run quickly and open it. No one must be left out in the cold on our beautiful Christmas Eve."

The child ran to the door and threw it wide open. The mother saw the ragged stranger standing without, cold and shivering, with bare head and almost bare feet. She held out both hands and drew him into the warm, bright room. "You poor, dear child," was all she said, and putting her arms around him, she drew him close to her breast. "He is very cold, my

children," she exclaimed. "We must warm him." "And," added the little girl, "we must love him and give him some of our Christmas, too." "Yes," said the mother, "but first let us warm him."

The mother sat down by the fire with the little child on her lap, and her own little one warmed his half-frozen hands in theirs. The mother smoothed his tangled curls, and, bending low over his head, kissed the child's face. She gathered the three little ones in her arms and the candle and the fire light shone over them. For a moment the room was very still. By and by the little girl said softly, to her mother, "May we not light the Christmas tree, and let him see how beautiful it looks?" "Yes," said the mother. With that she seated the child on a low stool beside the fire, and went herself to fetch the few simple ornaments which from year to year she had saved for her children's Christmas tree. They were soon so busy that they did not notice the room had filled with a strange and brilliant light. They turned and looked at the spot where the little wanderer sat. His ragged clothes had changed to garments white and beautiful; his tangled curls seemed like a halo of golden light about his head; but most glorious of all was his face, which shone with a light so dazzling that they could scarcely look upon it.

In silent wonder they gazed at the child. Their little room seemed to grow larger and larger, until it was as wide as the whole world, the roof of their low house seemed to expand and rise, until it reached the sky.

With a sweet and gentle smile the wonderful child looked upon them for a moment, and then slowly rose and floated through the air, above the tree-tops, beyond the church spire, higher even than the clouds themselves, until he appeared to them to be a shining star in the sky above. At last he disappeared from sight. The astonished children turned in hushed awe to their mother, and said in a whisper, "Oh, mother, it was the Christ-Child, was it not?" And the mother answered in a low tone, "Yes."

And it is said, dear children, that each Christmas Eve the little Christ-Child wanders through some town or village, and those who receive him and take him into their homes and hearts have given to them this marvellous vision which is denied to others.

SANDY'S CHRISTMAS[1]

Thomas Travis

THERE were three of them, plodding wearily through the snow, a man, a woman, and a boy about six years old. The man and the woman seemed gloomy, sad, and walked along silently till, with a deep sigh, the man spoke: "It's too bad, too bad, Mother, the storm coming up like this. If it had only held off a couple of hours more, we'd have made town all right. But as it is—well, what'll we do?" And he looked wearily at the snow-covered mountains and the trackless waste of snow. He shivered as his cold face brushed a laden bush that dabbed his bare neck with icy snow. "It's bitter cold, isn't it, Mother? And if I'm not mistaken, the storm's only just beginning."

The mother was too tired to answer. They had walked this way all day.

"If it had only held off a couple of hours," the man repeated gloomily, "we'd have made the town all right. And there's a job for me there. We'd have had a good Christmas, after all."

"Oh well, Daddy," said little Sandy, sturdily, "maybe the storm'll stop soon and somebody come

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along and give us a ride. Wouldn't it be fun if we could have a real sleigh-ride—at Christmas?''

But nobody came along the bleak waste, as they still plodded on. And the storm did not stop. It blew up stronger and stronger before a bitter northeast wind that sent whirling clouds of icy snow against their faces and sifted it down their necks, till they were wet and half frozen. It was only about four in the afternoon; but the wind had now risen to a howling storm that made the great trees rock and groan and scream in answer to the snoring of the white gale, and forced the three to bend almost double to force their way against it.

They were all three tired, miserably tired, and hungry and cold. The snow-laden swirls covered them till they looked like walking ghosts. Little Sandy's feet ached dreadfully; but he was a sturdy lad, and as he walked, he kept chattering out all sorts of questions, just to keep his mind off his cold feet. He didn't care whether his questions were answered or not—he just talked.

A big crow came swirling down the gale, veered in the shelter of a clump of pines, set his black wings, and, with a doleful caw, settled on one of the lower branches. Another did the same, and another, the three crows snuggling up to each other with a soft chuckle that said, just as plain as plain could be: ''Boy, but it's cold! And it's going to be a cold night for old Jim Crow. Better be looking up a bed now, before it gets too dark. It's a hummer, this gale is, a hummer!''

And the father felt just about the same. "We'd better look for some sort of a shelter, Mother," he said; "we can't make town to-night. We'll be frozen stiff. Just my luck! Out of work since Thanksgiving; get a letter that there's a good job here for me if I can make it by Christmas—and here's this snow!" And he peered through the blinding storm to where the city lights showed once in a while deep down in the valley.

"But look, Dad!" Sandy shouted; "look! There's just the place for us." And he pointed down in a hollow, where a little log-cabin lay pushed into a thick clump of tall evergreens.

Snow was drifted over the roof and over the trail to the door, as they entered and looked around. In fact, it had no door, only the place for one. It had two windows, but only one had glass in it. And it had neither fireplace nor stove—only a square of logs filled in with sand, for the fire, and a hole in the roof to let the smoke out.

"Just my luck!" said the father; "just my luck!" And he shivered again as the bitter wind swirled a cloud of icy snow through the door and window.

But Sandy piped up: "Well, anyhow, it's better than nothing. And besides, I think it's just fine. We can camp here and be all right. Come on, let's make a warm fire." For his feet ached now so badly he could scarcely keep the tears back.

They hunted around, found an old lantern, and lit it, for it was now dark. And the gale had helped

them somewhat, after all. For they found great dry branches of the fragrant pine, broken off by the wind, piled in heaps—some of it splintered to shreds under the twisting of the gale.

Soon a roaring fire was going. But the wind, howling through the doorway and the window, made it pretty hard to get warm.

"Just my kind of luck!" grumbled the father.

But Sandy said: "Supposin' we get some of those little trees, those pine and spruce, and pack them in the door and window. That will keep the wind out, and make us snug as a bug in a rug. Come on."

So they packed the window and the door with spruce-trees broken off and stuck in the deep drift. Father sighed a bit with satisfaction, and Mother sat down with a weary smile, thrusting her hands out to the blaze as she looked tenderly at the boy.

"Fine Christmas, isn't it?" grunted the father, again; "fine Christmas! Look at the icicles hanging on that spruce. Look at the snow powdering the tree, and that right in the room with us. Fine Christmas!"

"Sure it's fine," said Sandy, sturdily. "I think it's finer than a boughten tree. It's a real Christmas tree, and it's got real icicles, not glass ones. And it's got real snow for powder. All we want is some birds and stars and things on it, and there wouldn't be a better Christmas tree anywhere. Mother and Daddy, you rest. I'll go out here and get a good stack of wood,—that'll keep the fire going,—and then we'll

have something to eat and we'll be fine." So, stamping his cold feet, he squeezed through the blocked door and crept out under the great pines.

Now what with the dense evergreens and the log-cabin, it was comparatively quiet and calm there under the pines. And Sandy got his first glimpse of how the wild creatures live through a storm. The lower branches of the pines were crowded with crows, jays, and other feathered waifs of the storm. They were doing their best to keep warm, and having a hard time of it in that bitter gale.

You know, these wild birds must sleep out in all kinds of weather. You know, too, that most birds' feet can cling to a bough even when they are asleep. Also, you know that feather coats are warmer even than fur. And these birds, huddled together for shelter, picking out the thickest parts of the low boughs, snuggled down in the roaring gale and tucked their heads under their wings, crouching down low so that their feather overcoats could cover them from head to feet.

But perhaps you may not know that there is one weak point about this feather overcoat. They can not entirely cover up in it. There is just one spot at the eye which they can not cover. That too, perhaps, is to shield them. They keep one eye out, literally, for the fox and the owl and the hawk. But on a bitter night like this, there is another trouble. If it gets too cold, that one spot, meant for a lookout, will freeze. And often after a bitter winter gale you will find crows and jays and snowbirds blinded by the cold.

They have changed positions, put one eye, and then the other under, but been able to keep neither warm. That one bit, exposed, acts just as if you were all tucked in blankets, except one toe. You can keep changing the toe, but in bitter weather, very bitter, that toe will freeze. So with the birds that roost. They have no nest; they do not crawl into some hole. They roost in fear of their enemies, and sometimes pay the terrible penalty for that one hole in their feather blanket.

That's why sometimes you hear a "thump" on your window on a very cold winter night, and the next morning, find a poor quail or grouse or jay or crow cold, freezing, half-blind already. He had seen the glow of your fire dimly and flown to it—for safety.

And that was what was happening when Sandy crept out to get more firewood. This was a record blizzard—a bitter, freezing, zero night. And the birds were doing their level best to keep their eyes warm. They did not even notice Sandy as he crept near and watched. Some meadow-larks and quail had crouched under the snow-covered bushes at the foot of the pines, and they were bunched together, all heads out and all trying to keep their eyes from freezing. Sandy saw it and felt sorry for them. He was trying to keep his own feet from freezing, and knew how it felt. But he could not help the birds.

He could see the glow of the fire through the spruce-blocked door and window. It shone cheerily through the one window with glass. And hastily

Sandy gathered some wood and came back inside. Then they ate their supper, Sandy saving the crumbs for the birds.

The blizzard grew worse and worse. The great trees rocked and groaned and cracked till Sandy thought they would break off short and tumble on the shaking cabin. Some of them did split, with a boom like thunder, and fell with a muffled thud in the deep snow. Then came faint twitterings and dismayed caws. The birds were having a hard time out there.

There came a thud against the single pane, and Sandy lifted the sash to take in two quail that had flown against the glass in their attempt to come into the warm room. But the crows were wiser than the quail. They came farther down through the twigs and roosted on the branches. They showed the others the way to the warm room. Then came some snowbirds, their black-and-white feathers all fluffed out with frost; and meadow-larks, quail, and grouse, all perching on the tree in the window; all grateful for the warm refuge in that terrible blizzard. Even a couple of rabbits came hopping through the open door and crouched panting from the gale.

So Sandy and Father and Mother sat over the fire, trying hard to keep warm. Mother was so tired she soon fell asleep, her head resting on Sandy's lap. They sat late, very late—almost to midnight. And then came a wonderful thing—the storm stopped almost suddenly. The stars came out; the northern lights began to glow and burn like melted opals, like

soft fires, all colors, in the sky. It was Christmas eve, and the churchbells in the valley began to ring out Christmas carols—

> It came upon the midnight clear,
> That glorious song of old.

Faintly the bells rang, faint and far across the snow.

So Sandy did not hear the approach of anybody till there came a hail at the door. Pulling away the spruce that blocked it, Sandy was surprised to see a great, burly man enter, with a sheep under one arm and half a dozen panting after him.

"Saw your firelight, neighbor," he said. "Just out trying to save my sheep in the storm. Thought I'd never make it. But here we are." And shepherd and sheep crowded into the room.

"Come right along," said the father. "It's a bitter night. Seems as if the cold grew worse since the wind dropped. Come on in and sit down by the fire. Fine Christmas, eh?"

The man with the sheep sat down, throwing off his pack and using it as a chair. Puffing and blowing, pulling icicles from his beard, he rumbled: "Fine Christmas, you say? Well now, I'm glad of a place to be in out of the cold. This looks fine enough to me. Thought I'd never make it." And he continued combing the ice from his beard and mustache. "Fine Christmas when I thought it was going to be a case of freeze and lose all the sheep, and then get them

safe into a nice snug place like this. This *is* fine Christmas luck!"

"Sure it's fine," laughed Sandy, whose feet were now warm again. "And just look! If that isn't the finest Christmas tree any boy ever had." And he pointed to the tree in the window.

It really was wonderful. Back of the tree blazed a big star, just as if it hung on the topmost twig. Scores of others twinkled through the evergreen boughs. The northern lights crackled and shone mysteriously; and against the lit sky they could see the birds crouching—crows, iridescent, jays, gaudy blue, meadow-larks, with breasts dipped in gold, quail, grouse, and snowbirds in lovely markings and shadings, all perched on the tree, chuckling and crooning as though come there specially to decorate it. Great icicles hung down glittering in the low glow of the fire; and over all, the powdered snow glittered like diamonds.

"It's a fine Christmas tree, and I'm going to hang my stockings on it when I go to bed."

"Much good it'll do you, Sandy," grinned his father; "no Christmas, no Santa this time." Then, turning to the shepherd, he explained grumpily, "Out of work; goin' for a job; caught in this storm; stony broke—at Christmas time."

"Hard lines," said the shepherd, soberly; "but that's a fine boy you have. Seems a bright youngster and just as chipper as can be."

"Anyhow," said Sandy, as he curled in his blanket before the fire, "I've hung up my stockings.

Maybe good old Santa will remember me after all."

He really didn't expect anything, you know; but still he was a cheery soul. And as he slept, he dreamed—dreamed a big, strong, genial Santa came and filled his stockings with the nicest things—dreamed, and mumbled in his sleep, "Well, anyhow, it's a good Christmas, after all."

But the others just slept—Father and Mother too sad and tired even to dream, till they were roused in the early dawn of Christmas by a wild yell from Sandy. There he stood in his blanket, hauling out gift after gift from his stockings, from the twigs of the trees, and even some from beneath the tree.

He never knew how they got there. But Sandy's father told me that the shepherd had them all in his pack, bringing them home for his own family Christmas tree. But the storm that stopped Sandy's father, stopped him too. And seeing Sandy so sturdy and brave in the cold and night, he thought he would give the presents to him and then buy others, since he couldn't get home in time for Christmas eve.

But Sandy never knew how they came. His eyes simply grew big and shining in his six-year-old face. His squeals of joy rang through the cabin, till even the sheep huddled together a little nervously and watched him with shy eyes. The birds of the tree chuckled and flew out into the new dawn of Christmas day. The shepherd's sleigh came along and gave them all a lift to town. And Father got his new job!

As the party separated in town, the shepherd took little Sandy in his big strong arms as the boy said:

"Well, we had a merry Christmas, didn't we? I think it was fine."

And the shepherd gave him an extra hug as he answered: "Sandy, you have the best Christmas gift of all. A Merry Christmas comes from inside a man, from his happy and live soul, from his brave spirit. The boy that has a gift like that doesn't need anything else. He'll have a Merry Christmas anywhere."

Sandy didn't entirely understand. He just shook hands cheerily with the shepherd, waved an arm to the sheep, now huddled cosily in the straw of the sled, picked up his bundle, and walked on with a grin of joy.

"And anyhow," he said that night, as he heard his father telling about the terrible Christmas eve they had had, "anyhow, we had a real tree and real birds and real stars and real snow powder and real sheep and—a real shepherd! I think it was just the finest Christmas tree any boy ever had."

THE LITTLE FIR-TREE [1]

Carolyn Wells

LONGER ago than you ever heard of, and farther away than you ever dreamed, the great Tree-master went out to make the trees.

Now the making of trees was a most important matter, and the Tree-master put his whole mind to it. He made all sorts of trees to use for building houses and making things to furnish the houses. Oak, maple, elm, ash, mahogany, rosewood, and many more, as you well know.

Then he made all sorts of trees to bear food: fruits, nuts, olives, and queer things like bread-fruit and cocoanuts.

And he made lovely trees just to look pretty. He made dogwood, magnolia, horse-chestnut, and holly.

Then the Tree-master gave each tree its orders about blooming blossoms and bearing fruit, and at last the Tree-master thought his work was about done, and he turned to go away.

"Oh, please, sir," said an anxious little voice, "aren't you going to give me anything nice to do?"

"Who is speaking?" growled the Tree-master, in a voice of thunder.

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"It's only I," and a very trembly tone reached his ear. "I'm a little fir-tree, and I'm neither beautiful nor useful."

"You're good enough," said the Tree-master, as he glanced at the poor little thing. "Behave yourself, and no one will notice you."

But they did notice her. The springtime came, and all the fruit-trees put on their beautiful blossom-frocks, and they jeered at the forlorn little fir-tree.

"Ho!" said the apple-tree, "look at my pink and white garb. Is it not exquisite? Don't you wish you could be dressed like this?"

The poor little fir-tree looked on with longing eyes, but she was too crushed to reply.

"And see mine!" vaunted the peach-tree. "Was there ever such a perfect shade of color as I wear? How it is set off by my green leaves!"

The little fir-tree, though tempted to envy them, had a generous heart, and she said, "Your clothes are indeed beautiful, O Apple-tree and Peach-tree! I never saw more delicate and lovely coloring. Indeed, I wish I might dress like that! I have my old dull needles!"

"And see me!" cried the cherry-tree; "after all, there's nothing more beautiful than my pure white with touches of feathery green."

"True, true," agreed the little fir-tree. "The colors are all so lovely, I scarce know which to choose."

The fruit-trees tossed their blossomy branches, and showers of dainty petals fell all around.

"Oh!" cried the little fir-tree, enraptured, "I never saw anything so wonderful! If only I had been made like that!"

But the fruit-trees paid little heed to the fir-tree's lament, they were so busy admiring themselves and flaunting their glories to the breeze.

Then the wood trees broke into their soft spring greens.

"Look at me!" said a young maple, proudly; "is not my pale yellowy green as lovely as the pink and white of the fruit-trees?"

And gazing at the delicate shade of the tiny leaves, the little fir-tree admitted that it was.

"Oh," she said, with a deep sigh, "if I could have that soft light green to wear, I wouldn't ask for pink blossoms! But how I hate my old dull needles!"

The oaks and elms put out their young green also, and the feathery willows down by the brook waved young withes like fairy wands.

As every fresh beauty unfolded, the poor little fir-tree wept anew and wished the Tree-master had given her the like. But so engrossed were the trees in watching their own decorations that they paid small heed to the sad little fir-tree.

And then summer came. The fir-tree felt sure new beauties would come to the trees, and she almost hoped some wonderful change might come to her. But she watched and waited in vain.

The others, though! Ah, how they reveled in their happiness!

The fruit-trees fairly laughed aloud under their

happiness of fruit! Saucy red cherries, crimson velvet peaches, mellow golden apples, dewy purple plums, everywhere a riot of color, fragrance, and sweetness!

How they boasted!

"Ah, little fir-tree," they said: "what would you give for glories like these?"

And the poor, forlorn little fir-tree shook with sorrow to her very heart as she replied, "Ah, if I might be like that!"

"Too bad," said the peaches, carelessly, and they went about their business, which was to hold their soft cheeks up toward the sun that he might kiss them till they blushed.

"Yes, too bad!" chattered the pears, not heeding what they were saying, as they swayed gently on their stems while they slowly ripened to a golden and rosy glow.

The poor little fir-tree shuddered at their cruel indifference, which was even harder to bear than their outright scorn.

And the shade-trees were just as bad.

And then autumn came. Oh, the triumphs of the trees then! The wonderful flaming banners of scarlet and gold that they flung out to dazzle all nature! The rich depths of bronze and crimson that lurked mysteriously in their thick foliage!

The little fir-tree marveled. "Is there no end to their magnificence?" she thought: "must I ever see more and more of these wonders that I may not share?"

And the poor little thing wept until her needles lay in a pool all around her feet. The willows down by the brook saw her and they wept in sympathy. The little fir-tree saw the weeping willows and she was grateful for their kind thought, but so saddened was she that she only wept more needles to the ground.

And the nut-trees! They shook their nuts in her very face, and taunted her afresh with her uselessness and her lack of beauty.

The little fir-tree thought she would die.

And then the Tree-master came walking around. "Hey, hey, what's this?" he exclaimed, as he saw the sadness of the little fir-tree.

In a burst of woe, the fir-tree told him all her trials and sorrows.

"Oh, pooh, pooh," said the old Tree-master, who was really most kind-hearted, "have you forgotten this? All through the winter the other trees will be shivering and shaking in bare boughs. They will have no beauty and they will be sad and forlorn. You will be green and handsome, and then you can ask them why they look so ugly and downcast."

The fir-tree cheered up a little, for though not vindictive, she had been so scorned by the other trees that she was glad to look pretty in the winter when they were forlorn and bare.

And yet, somehow, she felt it was not enough. To be sure she was green and glossy and shapely, and all the other trees looked really ugly, but she had no gay-colored blossoms and no rich fruits or nuts.

The kind old Tree-master laughed when he heard this. He was not so busy now, and he could listen to the troubles of his little fir-tree.

"Ho! ho!" he said; "so you want fruit and flowers, do you? Well, I rather guess we can fix that! Hereafter you shall bear wonderful fruit and flowers and nuts every winter, when the other trees are impatiently waiting for spring. And the blossoms and fruits you show shall far, far excel anything they have ever flaunted in your face!"

The little fir-tree could scarcely believe this good news. But it was true.

The Tree-master ordered that she should be the Christmas Tree!

And so, every winter, the fir-tree blossoms out in marvelous blooms of color and gold! Her branches are hung with wondrous fruits such as never grew on a summer tree! Nuts are there, and more holly berries than the holly-tree herself ever showed! And high above, crowning the glorified little fir-tree, the Christmas star sheds its rays in a blessing never bestowed on any other tree!

SIR CLEGES [1]

George Philip Krapp

In the days of Uther, the father of King Arthur, there lived a knight in England who was a member of the famous Round Table, and his name was Sir Cleges. Of all his knights none was dearer to King Uther than Sir Cleges. There was nothing strange in this, for everybody loved Sir Cleges, both because he was brave and good and cheerful, and, above all, because he was so generous. No poor man ever came to Sir Cleges in vain. He was always ready to help those upon whom sickness or the waste of war or any other misfortune had fallen, and far and wide he was known as the poor man's friend. And not only was Sir Cleges known for his charity to the poor, but he was famous also for his generosity toward those of his own rank and station in life. His hall and his chambers were always filled with guests, and his tables were always spread for those who were hungry. There was no lack of the very best food and drink in Sir Cleges' house, and when good food and drink are to be found, you may be sure there will be plenty of friends to enjoy them.

[1] Reprinted by permission of the author and "St. Nicholas Magazine."

Thus Sir Cleges and his fair wife, the Lady Clarys, kept open house with the most generous hospitality. Most of all at Christmas-time there were great feasting and merriment in Sir Cleges' castle. From every corner of England the knights and their ladies gathered there, and so cheerful and kind were Sir Cleges and Lady Clarys, and so abundant was the fare provided for all comers, that you might have searched all through King Uther's kingdom and not have found any Christmas feasting happier or more cheerful than that under Sir Cleges' roof.

Thus for many years Sir Cleges lived in this generous fashion, and never thought of his money except as a means whereby he could help the needy or give pleasure to his friends. But there is always an end even to the longest purse, and, as time went on and as Sir Cleges' friends grew more numerous, it took more and more to entertain them. All the money he had, Sir Cleges spent freely; and when his money was gone, he sold his cattle and other goods to keep up his household. But this was soon used, and after that Sir Cleges' lands went the same way as his money and his cattle. As long as he had a penny left, said Sir Cleges, no friend should know the lack of it. But at last, when Sir Cleges had nothing more to sell and nothing in which the swarm of friends who had gathered about him could find their pleasure and profit, then straightway they heartlessly left him.

Thus the good Sir Cleges, who had never thought of his own welfare, but had spent all his substance

in order that others might be comfortable and happy, now found himself deserted as soon as he had nothing more to give. He was no longer able to appear at King Uther's court, and he who had been one of the merriest and best loved of the knights of the Round Table dropped quietly out of sight and soon was altogether forgotten. With his wife and his children, Sir Cleges went to live in the one poor house that was left to him, and there in poverty and obscurity he strove to forget the fickle friends who had so readily forsaken him.

Now it happened some years after this that King Uther decided to spend the Christmas-tide at the royal castle of Cardiff, which stood not far from Sir Cleges' humble dwelling. Great preparations were made for the Christmas feasting, and invitations were sent out to all the brave knights of the kingdom. On Christmas eve all the knights and their ladies were come together at Cardiff, and then the feasting began in earnest. The cooks and the servers ran hither and thither, and all was excitement and bustle. In the great hall, there were tumblers and dancers and magicians to amuse the Christmas feasters with their tricks and gamboling. Singers and minstrels of all kinds had been summoned, and the music of the pipes and trumpets and bugles was heard far and wide. Nothing was spared that might help to make the time speed rapidly and joyously for all the assembled knights and their ladies.

In his little house not far away, Sir Cleges heard the sounds of rejoicing in the great hall of the castle,

and it made him sad and bitter. He had not been invited to the feasting, for long since he had been forgotten and none of his old friends troubled to inquire whether he was dead or living. "Many a happy day," said Sir Cleges, to the Lady Clarys, "have I given to those who reck not now of my sorrow." But the Lady Clarys would not allow Sir Cleges to dwell on thoughts of unkindness, and bade him consider how much they still had to be grateful for, and thus little by little she comforted him and brought him again to contentment.

Thus the Christmas eve Sir Cleges and the Lady Clarys spent quietly in their humble cottage, and found such pleasure in the innocent joys and playfulness of their happy children that they had no longing for the noisy revelry of the courtiers in the castle of Cardiff.

The next day was Christmas day, and, with good will in their hearts for all men, Sir Cleges and the Lady Clarys went to the church to give thanks for their many blessings. Now after the church was over, Sir Cleges walked in his garden; and after a time he knelt down to pray beneath a cherry-tree that stood in the midst of the garden. As Sir Cleges knelt, praying, he suddenly felt a bough of the tree striking him on the head, and, seizing hold of it and springing to his feet, lo, what was his astonishment to see the bough covered with green leaves and full of cherries—red, ripe, and luscious! Picking one of the cherries, Sir Cleges put it into his mouth, and

t seemed to him he had never tasted anything so delicious. Gathering more of the fruit, he ran into the house and cried out, "Behold, Dame Clarys, what a marvel is here!" And when the Lady Clarys had come she could hardly believe her eyes. "Cherries at Christmas-time!" she exclaimed. "How can such a thing be!" And when Sir Cleges had told her how he had been praying beneath the tree, how he had felt a bough striking him on the head, and how, when he took hold of it, he had found it filled with green leaves and ripe fruit, then the Lady Clarys believed that the cherries were real, and great was her wonder at the marvel which had happened in their little garden.

"Now hast thou indeed," she said, "a present fit for a king! No longer grieve that thou hast no Christmas offering for the good King Uther, for cherries such as these I doubt he has ever seen."

And then the Lady Clarys counseled Sir Cleges to gather the cherries and to put them in a basket and bear them straightway as a present to the king. And Sir Cleges, glad at heart that even in his poverty he could do something to add to the joy of the king's Christmas feasting, readily consented so to do.

To Cardiff Castle Sir Cleges took his way, and on his arm he bore the basket of the wonderful fruit. It was just dinner-time when Sir Cleges reached the castle gate, and all the court were about to sit down to meat. But when the porter at the gate saw the

poverty-stricken man with a basket on his arm approaching to enter, he drove him away with scorn and reviling.

"Begone, old beggar," he said, "with thy rags and thy tatters! What have such as thou to do entering kings' castles? Let me see the last of thee, or thou shalt not soon forget where thou belongest."

"Pray let me through the gate, good porter," answered Sir Cleges, to this greeting. "I have here in this basket a Christmas present for the king."

"Thou a Christmas present for the king! A likely story, in sooth! Show me what thou hast in thy basket that thou thinkest worthy a king."

And then, when Sir Cleges lifted the cover of the basket and showed him the cherries, he was surprised almost beyond speech. "Heaven defend us!" he exclaimed; "cherries at Christmas-time! How can such a thing be? Certainly this is a present worthy a king. But listen, old man," said he, greedily, "thou shalt not pass through this gate unless thou dost promise to give me a third of the reward which the king shall give for the present thou bringest." And Sir Cleges, seeing no other way of passing the gate, promised the porter that one third of the reward should be his.

Now after Sir Cleges had passed by the porter, he thought all would be well; but no sooner had he reached the door of the hall than he was met by the usher, who forbade him to go in.

"Out with thee, old fellow!" he exclaimed. "How

camst thou here? This is no place for beggars and basket-men such as thou."

Then when Sir Cleges said he had a present in his basket for the king, the usher, like the porter, must see what the present could be.

"Holy Saint Peter!" he gasped, when Sir Cleges had lifted the cover of the basket. "Cherries at Christmas-time! How can such a thing be?"

But he soon recovered from his surprise and told Sir Cleges he might go in, but only if he promised that one third of the reward which the king gave him should come to him. And Sir Cleges, thinking how hard it was to do even a kindness to a king, must needs promise as he had done before.

When Sir Cleges entered the great hall all was bright and merry there. The knights and the ladies of King Uther's court, all decked in their finest feathers and silks, were about to sit down to the banquet. The serving-men went scurrying back and forth from the kitchen, bearing platters of rich food for the king's feasters and stumbling over each other in their excitement and hurry. The table was hardly able to carry everything they wanted to put upon it. There were great haunches of venison, and roast swans and geese and ducks and pheasants by the dozen. At each end, there stood a huge pasty almost as big around as a cart wheel. The king's cooks had used all their art in concocting cakes and pies and puddings, to say nothing of the sweetmeats of marchpane molded into the forms of towers and

castles, or of knights on horseback, or baskets of fruit and flowers, and various other fanciful and astonishing structures. Everybody's mouth was watering, but the king was not yet ready to sit down to the feasting, and the courtiers and their ladies stood chatting and laughing merrily with one another. All were too busy to pay any heed to the shabby Sir Cleges, with the basket on his arm, until the watchful eye of the king's haughty steward happened to fall upon him. Horrified to see such a melancholy figure in the midst of so gay a company, he hastened up to Sir Cleges and was hustling him out of the hall with short ceremony before Sir Cleges managed to say that he had a present for the king.

"Beggars are not givers," said the steward; "but show me, what is the present thou dost bring?"

Then, when Sir Cleges had lifted the cover of the basket and had shown him the cherries, he was no less surprised than the others had been, nor was he less greedy.

"Cherries at Christmas!" he exclaimed. "Whoever heard of such a thing? But listen, sir," said he, in a low voice, "thou speakest not with the king unless thou promise me one third of the reward he gives thee."

When Sir Cleges heard these words he thought to himself: "Little enough am I to get out of this. If I have a dinner for my pains, it's as much as I may look for." But he said nothing until the steward prodded him again, and then, seeing that there was

no other way of getting by this greedy officer, he promised him a third of his reward, as he already had done to the porter and the usher.

At last the way was free for Sir Cleges; and with his precious basket, he made his way through the throng of the courtiers to the place where the king was seated on a dais.

"Receive, O King," said he, falling on his knees before King Uther, "this Christmas offering from one of thy most humble subjects."

And when King Uther looked into the basket and saw that it was filled with luscious red cherries, he too, like the Lady Clarys, could hardly believe his eyes.

"Cherries at Christmas!" he cried. "Now certainly this is a marvel, and a right worthy gift thou has brought to us, good fellow." Then when he had tasted one of the cherries he declared a better cherry he had never eaten. And then he gave some to each of the knights and ladies; and they all wondered greatly to see such fruit at that bleak season.

"The king's thanks hast thou won," said Uther to Sir Cleges, "for thou hast made this Christmas feasting forever memorable. But sit thou now at our table and have part in our dinner, and afterward thou shalt have whatever reward for thy gift that thou askest."

Then he motioned to the haughty steward to make a place for Sir Cleges; and certainly a strange figure this shabby knight made among all the gay lords and their ladies. Little they thought that this humble

stranger had once bestowed benefit upon many a one of them, and little heed they paid to one whom they took to be but a poor old gardener! But Sir Cleges said nothing, and sat quietly at the table, to his heart's content enjoying all the good things the king had provided for his Christmas dinner. And though the best cooks of the land had shown there all their skill and cunning, nothing at that feast was so wonderful as the cherries which had been brought by the humble stranger.

Now when the dinner was over, the king had not forgotten the poor man who had brought him the unexpected present, and summoning Sir Cleges to him, he bade him ask whatever reward he would in return for his welcome present. Then Sir Cleges bethought himself of the promises he had made to the porter, the usher, and the steward, and he said:

"Lord, King, this is the reward I ask: twelve strokes of this good staff that I bear in my hand, to be delivered on whomsoever it may please me within this royal castle."

"A strange fellow art thou!" answered the king, in astonishment at this; "and from thy looks, thou hadst done better to ask for something more worthy my giving. But, since it is thy request, thou shalt not find the king fail of his promise. Take thy strokes and deliver them as thou see'st fit."

"Thanks for thy boon, King Uther," answered Sir Cleges; "none other shall please me so well as this one."

And then, turning to the steward in the hall, with

his staff Sir Cleges gave him a blow on the shoulders that made him bend double. "Three more thou gettest," he said, "for that is the full share coming to thee!"

And with a right good will Sir Cleges gave the three strokes, and left the proud steward groaning with pain and terror. Then to the hall door Sir Cleges made his way and delivered another four, no less hearty and stinging, on the shoulders of the astonished usher.

"There, thou hast thy share!" said Sir Cleges, as he hastened to the gateway.

The porter greeted him eagerly, but he little guessed what was coming. Four times Sir Cleges lifted his staff and let it fall with all his might on the back of the greedy porter. And this last third of Sir Cleges' boon you can be sure was not less light than the others had been.

When Sir Cleges had thus delivered the three thirds of the reward for his present, he found at his elbow a messenger from the king, who bade him return to the great hall of the castle. All the courtiers and the king were still there and were listening to a song the minstrel was singing. Now this song, as it happened, was made about Sir Cleges himself, and the minstrel was telling how this generous knight had spent all his days making other people happy and now was altogether lost and forgotten.

"Poor Sir Cleges!" sighed the king, "I loved him well, but alas! I have no hope ever again to see him."

Just then, however, Sir Cleges knelt down before the king and thanked him for the reward he had given him, and told him that the twelve strokes had been duly delivered.

"But I beseech thee, good fellow," answered the king, "tell me what the meaning of this may be. Why were these strokes on the shoulders of my varlets more pleasing to thee than a reward of gold or silver?"

Then Sir Cleges told the king how the porter, the usher, and the steward had each demanded a third of his reward before they would permit him to make his present, and he added, "May they learn thus to be more free in giving and less greedy in demanding. Perchance the next poor man may not find it so hard to come into the king's presence."

When the king and his courtiers heard all this, they laughed, and were delighted with the story.

"Well done," said the king, "thou wielder of the staff! Thou hast taught these knaves a good lesson. How now, master steward, how likest thou thy share of this fellow's present?"

"May the fiends burn him in flames below!" muttered the steward, as he rubbed the bruises on his shoulders.

Now the king was so pleased with all these happenings that had made his Christmas feasting so merry that he turned again to Sir Cleges and asked him what his name was.

"My name, sire," answered the poverty-stricken

knight, "is one not unknown to thee in the days of old. My name is Sir Cleges."

"What!" exclaimed the king, "art thou the long-lost Sir Cleges whom men to this day praise for his good deeds and his charity?" And so moved with joy was the good King Uther to find his old friend again that he came down from his high seat and took him by the hand and could not make enough of him. When the courtiers saw how things were going, they all flocked around Sir Cleges claiming his friendship and acquaintance.

But the king did not stop with kind words. He knew that a knight with a heart as true and loyal as the heart of Sir Cleges was not easily to be found, even among the knights of the Round Table, and now he was determined never again to lose him. So he gave to him the good castle of Cardiff to dwell in and other lands and fees wherewith he might live worthily.

Thus ended the king's Christmas feasting in the castle of Cardiff, and a happy day it was for the knight Sir Cleges and the Lady Clarys. Many a long year they lived in the noble castle the king had given them, and you may be sure that no selfish porters or ushers or stewards stood at the gates and doorways to stop any poor man who would enter there.

CHRISTMAS NIGHT[1]

Selma Lagerlöf

"Once upon a time," said my Grandmother, as we sat together one Christmas Day when all the others had gone to church, "there was a man who went out at night to borrow some fire. 'Help me, kind people,' he said. 'My wife has a little baby, and I must light a fire to warm her and the child.'

"But it was very late, so everybody was asleep, and no one answered.

"The man walked farther and farther on. At last in the distance he saw the glimmer of flames, and, going in that direction, he perceived that the fire was burning in the open air. Around it lay sleeping a flock of white sheep, watched by an old shepherd.

"When the man came up he saw that three large dogs also rested asleep at the shepherd's feet. Waking at his approach, they opened their wide jaws as if to bark, but no sound was heard. The man saw the hair rise on their backs and their sharp teeth glitter in the firelight as they rushed upon him. One snapped at his legs, one at his hand, and a third sprang at his throat. But neither jaws nor teeth

[1] By permission of "Good Housekeeping." Translated expressly for this magazine from the Christ Legends of Selma Lagerlöf.

would obey and the man did not feel the smallest hurt.

"He wanted to go on that he might get what he needed. But the sheep lay so close together that he could not move forward. So he stepped on the animals' backs, and walked across them to the fire. But not a single one moved or stirred."

"Why didn't they move, Grandmother?" I asked.

"You will find out in a little while," answered Grandmother, and kept on with the story.

"When the man had almost reached the fire the shepherd looked up. He was a surly old man, cross and disagreeable to everybody. So when he saw the stranger, he caught up the long, pointed staff he carried in his hand while he was watching the flock, and hurled it at him. The stick flew straight at the man, but before it struck him, turned aside and whizzed far over the field."

Here I interrupted again. "Grandmother, why didn't the stick hit the man?" But she went on without answering.

"Then the man said to the shepherd, 'Good friend, aid me by letting me have a little fire. My wife has an infant child and I need it to warm them both.'

"The shepherd would gladly have refused, but when he thought that his dogs had not been able to hurt the man, that the sheep had not run from him, and his staff would not strike him, he felt a little afraid, and did not dare to do so.

" 'Take as much as you need,' he said.

"But the fire was almost out. There were no branches or brands, only a heap of glowing embers, and the stranger had nothing in which he could put the coals.

"The shepherd saw this and was glad because the man could get no fire. But the stranger stooped down, took the coals from the ashes with his hands, and put them in his cloak. And the coals neither scorched his hands nor singed his cloak. The man carried them away as if they were nuts or apples."

Here I interrupted a third time, "Grandmother, why wouldn't the coals burn the man?"

"You will soon hear," she replied, and went on.

"When the shepherd, who was a sullen, bad-tempered man, saw all these things, he began to wonder: 'What kind of night is this when the dogs do not bite, the sheep feel no fear, the lance does not kill, and fire does not burn?' He called to the stranger, asking: 'Why is it that all things show mercy upon you?'

" 'I cannot tell you if you do not see for yourself,' said the man, and went away to light the fire for his wife and child.

"But the shepherd wanted to find out what all this meant, so he followed him and discovered that the man did not even have a hut to live in, only a sort of cavern with bare stone walls.

"The shepherd thought the poor little child might be chilled, and though he was a harsh man, he pitied and wanted to help it. So he gave the stranger a

soft white sheepskin, and told him to put the child in it.

"But the very moment he showed that he, too, could be merciful, his eyes were opened and he saw and heard what he had neither seen nor heard before.

"He saw a dense circle of silver-winged angels, each with a harp in his hand, and all singing that on this night was born the Saviour, who would redeem the world from its sin.

"Then the shepherd understood why on this night all creatures were so happy that they did not desire to harm anything.

"The angels were not only around the shepherd, but he saw them everywhere. They were in the cave, on the mountains, and flying under the sky. They came in throngs along the way, and, as they passed, stopped and gazed at the child.

"There were joy and happiness and mirth and singing, and he saw all this amid the darkness of the night, where he had formerly seen and heard nothing. And he was so happy that his eyes were opened—that he fell on his knees and thanked God."

Then Grandmother sighed, saying, "But what the shepherds saw, we could see, too, for the angels are flying over the earth every Christmas Eve, if we could only see them."

And Grandmother laid her hand on my head, adding, "Remember this, for it is as true as that I see you and you see me. It does not depend upon candles and lamps, or on the moon and sun, but what we need is eyes to behold the glory of God."

A QUEER CHRISTMAS[1]

Marian Willard

It was Christmas morning—the very day when twins should be having the merriest time in the world. But Betty and Bob were not merry at all; they sat and looked at each other and hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

"That letter is the best present we could have had, anyway," said Betty as she looked again at the big special-delivery stamp. "It means that mother is out of danger and that we shall be at home in a month."

A month before that when mother was first taken sick, the twins had been sent to Uncle Ben's so that their own house should be very, very still. They had played on the big farm, had gone to school in the queer little old schoolhouse and watched for the rural delivery postman to bring them letters from home.

Christmas at home meant days of shopping, treats when Uncle Tom came home from college, parties at the church and at the schoolhouse, and

[1] This story was first printed in "Youth's Companion," December 14, 1922. Reprinted by permission of the author and "Youth's Companion."

Santa Claus, fat and jolly, ringing his little tinkling bells, ting-a-ling-aling! on the street corners. Besides that, Christmas at home meant planning for weeks ahead a gift that would bring Christmas cheer to some little child that was poor.

"Bobby, do you remember how pleased little Johnny Granger was when you gave him that pair of skates?"

"I guess I do! They were the first skates he had ever had! You gave his little sister a pair of rubber boots the same year. How happy she was with them! She wore them to school all winter whether it rained or not. I wish we could have some kind of a Christmas this year, just to keep from forgetting what day it is. There isn't even snow," and Bob looked with disgust at the bare, brown fields that stretched away in front of the little old farmhouse. "At home they've all been so worried over mother that probably no one has had time to buy us presents."

"Well, Bobby, mother is better and that is the best present in all the world for us," and Betty smiled bravely at her brother.

"I wish we could make a Christmas for somebody else," said Bobby slowly. "There aren't any poor people like the Granger family up here. Besides, we couldn't buy anything anyway, for there aren't any stores. Isn't this the strangest Christmas you ever saw?"

"Yes, Bob, it is. No place to spend money; woods full of Christmas trees and no presents to put on

them; no one who needs help; no snow or skating or company. We are going to have a fine Christmas dinner, though. Uncle Ben killed a pair of fat chickens yesterday."

"And I'm going to crack butternuts right now," said Bobby, and he jumped up and left his twin sister to romp with Buddy, the collie, who ran up to her and thrust his soft nose into her hand, teasing for a game of tag.

"O Buddy, Buddy, I'll give *you* a Christmas present," and Betty ran upstairs and came flying down again with a big blue ribbon in her hand.

"There, old fellow," she said as she tied a huge bow on Buddy's collar, "you are going to have a Christmas present." As she spoke she clapped her hands and ran for Bobby. "O, Bob, hurry up and finish your butternuts. I think we can have a Christmas after all. Hurry! Hurry!" Betty ran to find Uncle Ben and whisper something in his ear. She began to do the queerest things. Up to the attic she ran and down again, her arms full of big boxes and little ones; then down to the cellar, and up with an armful of carrots and apples; then out to the barn, and back with a box of corn and oats.

By that time Bobby had cracked all the butternuts for dinner and stood with his hands in his pockets, watching his sister. "What in the world are you doing?" he said with a grin.

Betty grinned at him. "You take the axe and go over to the upland pasture and cut down a little Christmas tree; Uncle Ben said we could."

"But we haven't a thing to put on the tree."

"We shall have something when you get back. Uncle Ben will take Mollie and meet you and haul the tree home."

Bob went off, wondering, and Betty began to snip up pieces of an old gray flannel shirt of Uncle Ben's and to rummage in the button box for old shoe buttons.

When Bob drove in with Uncle Ben and the little tree, Betty dangled in front of him seven gray mice by their tails of string. With shoe buttons for eyes and bodies made of gray flannel they looked so real that Uncle Ben jumped when he saw them.

"My land, child, those mice would fool any cat in the county!"

"Smell," answered Betty, and she dangled her treasures under her uncle's nose.

"Catnip mice," he chuckled.

"I guess I know now who your poor folks will be this year. They haven't a cent to their name, nor a shirt to their backs," laughed Bobby, "but why the tree?"

Such a busy morning as the twins had after that! Bob set up the tree in the middle of the big barn. Betty made little bundles that were as mysterious as any Christmas package you ever saw. Then she hung them on the tree; a package of meat cut fine for Buddy, marked with his name in big letters; seven catnip mice hung by their string tails for the seven cats on the farm; four carrots tied in a bunch of hay for Mollie; four apples tied in hay for

Duke, the old gray horse; lumps of sugar in little bundles for Buddy and Duke and Mollie.

Then Betty was puzzled. She ran to Uncle Ben. "What does a cow like best?" she asked.

"Well, my cows like cornstalks. There is a pile back of the old barn."

So there were bundles of cornstalks at the base of the tree. Betty tied them in loose bunches for the cows. On the floor, too, stood a big bag of corn for the hens.

After dinner the fun began. Everyone put on a sweater and went to the barn, Buddy at Betty's heels proud of his new bow. Not all the cats could be found, but five of them came in answer to Aunt Martha's call. Buddy took his meat and without a single "thank you" ran to an empty stall to eat it. The horses nodded "thank you" as they ate the sugar and the carrots and the apples that the children held out to them. Cats and kittens played with their catnip mice and lapped up saucers of milk. Mother Bunch slapped the gray kitten because he tried to steal her catnip mouse. The cows crunched their cornstalks and looked with mild surprise at the queer antics of the kittens. Bob carried the heavy pail of corn out to the hen yard and Betty fed the chickens which crowded to her feet.

When the children went back to the barn with the empty pail, they themselves had a surprise. A wild gray squirrel had stolen in at the open door, and was sitting up on his hind legs under the Christmas tree, eating the corn that had been spilled;

and he seemed as much at home as if he had been invited to the party.

"I guess he must be our poor family," laughed Betty as she threw him another handful of corn.

"Twinnies," suddenly called a man's voice from the yard. Only father called like that. The twins turned, and there he stood in the door of the barn, smiling at them. They rushed to his arms. How happy they were to see him.

"So you youngsters had a tree for the penniless poor, did you?" he said with a laugh.

"Well, run into the house with your father and I'll see what this tree will have for you," said Uncle Tom, who stood just behind their father, his arms loaded with bundles.

In less time than you would have thought it could be done, Uncle Tom had the tree ready for Betty and Bob.

"We have to start for home by five o'clock, so you children had better open your bundles right now," said father. The twins did not need to be told twice. Eagerly they opened the packages, gay with ribbons and seals. There were books, snowshoes, a red silk umbrella for Betty and a pair of skating boots for Bob; candy, a gold piece for each twin from Uncle Tom; and best of all, a little pencil note from mother to tell them that she was really better and to wish them a merry Christmas.

"Well," said Bobby as the big car drove out of the yard with father and Uncle Tom, "this hasn't been such a queer Christmas, after all."

A CHRISTMAS FOR TONY[1]

Zona Gale

Little Anthony punched his small, hard pillow, to make it as large as possible, so that his head would come well above the level of the window sill. Wonderful, thick, Christmas-looking snow was falling, though it wanted two days yet to Christmas.

"Mother!" he cried, "I wish all the snow in the world would come and fall in front of our window!"

"It looks as if it had come," said Mother Margaret.

That was what he usually called her—Mother Margaret: "Because that's your name!" he said. "Everybody calls you Margaret, in letters. Nobody but me says 'Mother.'"

"You want your head to be higher, don't you?" she said now, and put down the paper roses which, all day long, she made for a great factory.

She brought him her own pillow, and under that she folded a bed-comforter. The poor little room had not a single cushion.

"Now!" she cried, "you can see all the snow there is."

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At any rate, Anthony could see nothing but snow —snow, and the dim rectangle of the Window Across.

The Window Across was the back window of an apartment which faced the avenue. Anthony's window faced the court, and was over a store. There were three floors of families over the store, because the rooms were too old and inconvenient to use for offices. The Window Across had thin rose silk curtains at the casement and often, in the evening, one could look straight through to the front window and see bright moving figures and an unbelievable dinner table, all made of bright things. And two or three times, for ecstatic minutes, a little girl had come and stood at the Window Across. Once, indeed, she had come right away out on the fire-escape and stood there, dancing and laughing in the cold, until a white-capped maid had run in a panic and carried her in. Anthony's window had been open then, and he had heard the maid cry: "Dear Child!"

So he always called her Dear Child.

He lay now looking through the snow to the Window Across, and imagining that the snow lay so deep that they were at last obliged to make a tunnel from one window to another, so that anybody could get out at all. But it was always he and Mother Margaret who went down the tunnel to the Window Across—never the others who came up, because the little room was so bare and so shabby and so unlike the room he imagined beyond the rose silk curtains. And always he was well and strong instead of

obliged to lie in bed, as he had lain now for almost a year, to give strength to the poor back, wrenched and threatened by a fall.

Suddenly, as he looked, a beautiful thing happened. The silk curtains parted in the Window Across, the white-capped maid stood there, and she hung in the window a great wreath of Christmas holly tied with a scarlet bow.

Anthony sat up, and cried out and waved his thin little arms.

"Mother Margaret, Mother Margaret!" he cried. "Look—oh, look-at!"

Mother Margaret came and looked, and she exclaimed too, with something of pleasure—but through the pleasure there went darting and stabbing a pain which had been coming again and again these past few days; and as Christmas Day drew nearer, it had been hurting her more and more. It had come that morning when she had first waked. And she had said to herself, for the hundredth time:

"What *is* the use? You can buy him some fruit—a big orange and a red apple. You can manage a little something for Christmas dinner. But you can't do anything else, and what *is* the use in thinking about it?"

She put down her paper flowers now, and went over to Anthony's bed.

"Tony, dear," she said, "I *believe* you're thinking about Christmas."

He looked up, bravely and brightly.

"No, Mother, truly," he said, "I wasn't thinking about it hardly at all."

She sat down on the bedside and took his hand. "You do know, don't you, love," she said, "that Mother Margaret can't—she sure-enough can't—do anything for our Christmas this year! But another year—"

"Yes, yes!" Tony agreed eagerly, "another year!"

"This year things are bad enough," she said; "but if Mother thought that—somewhere in his little heart, he wasn't quite believing her, and was thinking that maybe, *maybe* some kind of Christmas would come to him, why, then—"

Her voice stopped of its own will—stopped, and steadied itself bravely, and went on again:

"Why, then," she said, "Mother just couldn't bear it *at all.*"

"Truly, Mother, truly!" said Anthony. "I know we can't—I do know. Oh, but—why, Mother Margaret! That's what makes it so nice to see the wreath! It's just as if we almost had a wreath in our window—isn't it, though?"

"Almost, almost," she said, and went back to her paper flowers. She had six dozen red roses to make before Christmas Eve.

"And then the snow," Anthony was saying eagerly. "Why, Mother, it's like all the Christmas pictures. It's like the Christmas cards. And oh, Mother,—think! It's just as nice and white for us as if we lived no matter where!"

"Yes," said his mother bitterly, "the snow and the cold are about the only things that are the same for us as for everybody."

Anthony half closed his eyes and lay watching happily. Mother Margaret went on with her roses. As she worked, her lips were moving. But she was not counting the petals, as one would have supposed. She was counting, as she almost always counted, what she had in her purse and what she *must* spend. And when one counts like this, all day long, it begins to show in one's face, in one's voice, in all one's ways. Anthony was seven. It was six years since his father had died. And every year of these six years she had been fighting to keep Anthony with her. But this meant that she counted all day long.

At five o'clock Mother Margaret went out with half her roses. At the factory she sent them in and asked, as she did each time, for more tissue paper. The manager looked doubtful. Had she enough to finish her order? Oh, yes, she said; but she carried a little back at each delivery. The man returned. She would have to wait—everyone was busy with the rush mail orders. They could give out no paper till Monday.

As she went out, she lingered and looked about her. She did not guess what a pretty picture she made in her old brown coat and hat which just matched her eyes. What about all these women, she was wondering. Some of them must have little children at home. And they must have to count almost as much as she counted. She wished that she knew how they

meant to manage about Christmas. Was there anything that she could do, if she knew how to do it, for Anthony's Christmas?

A middle-aged woman was packing boxes near her. Mother Margaret went shyly to her.

"I wonder," she said, "could you tell me anything you know how to do for a child's Christmas? Something that won't—that doesn't—"

The woman leaned on the box for a moment. She nodded comprehendingly.

"Why," she said, "no. Everything costs now. Did you ever try using the flowers?"

"The flowers?" Mother Margaret questioned.

"They decorate grand," said the woman. "You can get a lot made up ahead, and string them around the room. You can make a tree look lovely with 'em, and nothing else. And it don't hurt 'em none. Take 'em down, and they're like new."

Why had she never thought of that! She thanked the woman joyfully.

Mother Margaret flew along the street for the mile which she walked to save car fare, her head filled with visions. The pink and white and green tissue paper was there in their room; it was not hers, and it had not occurred to her that she could use it. But, just for one evening to borrow the flowers before she sent them out—oh, nobody could mind that. She could make the room beautiful, she could make a tree beautiful! But she knew she could not afford a tree.

There was one thing, however, which Mother Margaret could do. She had brought her library card

in expectation of it. She went into the little branch library near where she lived, and eagerly to the desk. In these days before the holidays there was almost no one in the room. The pleasant-faced young woman at the desk had time to greet her with unusual cordiality.

"Oh," said Mother Margaret, her cheeks flushed from her long walk, "I want you to find me a book. A book that a little child will like. A book all pictures. A Christmas book, if you can."

"That ought to be easy," the pleasant-faced young woman said, and went with her to the shelves, asking questions.

At the first book which she found and offered, Mother Margaret shook her head.

"No," she said, "it's got to be—to be larger than that. Thicker, I mean—it's got to last longer. You see," she explained, flushing still more, "I want it to last my little boy all day long, on Christmas. It's about the only Christmas he's going to have."

"I see," said the woman quietly.

"And then," Mother Margaret said, "if you had something about modeling. About modeling in clay—"

"Does your little boy model in clay?" the librarian asked.

Mother Margaret flushed again. "He never has had any clay or any tools," she said; "but he loves to read about it."

They found two books, one on clay modeling, and one with many pictures, and a story of somebody's

wonderful Christmas that came when none was expected. Then the librarian considered for a moment, looking at a colored sheet of birds on the bulletin-board; she took down the poster, rolled and tied it and, from the bowl on her desk, fastened a sprig of holly in the cord.

"Flowers and birds and a piece of holly!" Mother Margaret cried, and thanked her joyfully.

She bought her red apple and a great orange, looked longingly at a window of chocolates, and ran home with her treasures.

As she was leaving the things in the sitting-room, on her own bed, she heard Anthony calling her.

"Mother—oh, Mother! Come here!" he shouted excitedly. When she ran to him he was sitting up—his face as near to the window as he could get.

"Look at! *Look* at!" he said. "They've brought home their Christmas tree! They've hid it on the fire-escape!"

And there, leaning against the wall of the fire-escape, outside the Window Across, was a beautiful, tapering evergreen tree, sent home for Christmas and hidden outside there, unquestionably to surprise the Dear Child.

Anthony and his mother sat on the bed and looked at this tree. And presently they began to plan. On the very tip-top would be the star—or would it be the angel? They decided on the star. Below would come the ornaments, the candles, the nuts wrapped in silver paper, the pink hanging bags of candy, the pop-corn strings. All this Mother Margaret ar-

ranged, because she had seen many Christmas trees, and Anthony never had seen any. But there was one thing that he could plan.

"And then," he said, "right close under the tree, would be the box all full of clay and things to model with!"

"Yes," Mother Margaret agreed, with a catch in her voice. "That should be there, without a doubt." Then she whispered to him.

"Tony, dear," she said. "I've no Christmas for you. But I have got a little surprise."

Her heart ached at the leaping delight in his eyes as he looked up at her.

"Not a gift, dear," she hastened to say. "Just a little something for us to look at—oh, Tony, it isn't much at all!" she broke off.

"Why, Mother," Tony said, "a little much is *almost* as nice as a great big much, you know!"

The gayety with which she had come in was slipping away, now that she had seen the tree for the Dear Child. Presently she went in the other room and opened the box where she kept the tissue paper. But the flowers would be something, after all, in the dull little room on Christmas Day. She lifted out the sheets, and stood staring at them. There were not more than three dozen sheets, and she had three dozen of the roses yet to make. One rose required a sheet of paper. These must be delivered by Christmas Eve—to-morrow night! No more paper would be given out till Monday. She could not even have

the flowers for Anthony on Christmas day. . . .

If only Christmas were to-morrow!

She went back into Anthony's room and sat down beside his bed. She dreaded to tell him that even the poor "little much" of a surprise was not to be his. She put it off until they should have had their supper. After supper, in the dark, they could just see the tall shadow of the Christmas tree leaning against the opposite wall in the snow. Presently the Window Across flamed bright with the lighted globes within the room.

The tall Christmas tree there against the wall! Mother Margaret sat and stared at it. It seemed such a waste that it should be there all this time, with no one enjoying it. It seemed such a waste that it should stand there to-morrow, with no one enjoying it. It would be just as beautiful, decorated now, as it would be on Christmas Day. . . .

And then Mother Margaret's heart stood still at what it thought. But it thought about it once, it thought about it twice, and then it began to beat as Mother Margaret's heart did not often beat any more. She sprang up and stood looking out the window, across the court to the tree. Could she possibly bring herself to do it? Would she dare? What would they think—what would they do— Oh, but she must try!

"Tony," she said, "Mother must go out again now, for a few minutes."

She slipped down to the street, and around the

corner to the avenue. There was no difficulty in distinguishing the apartment building. She walked boldly in the door and to the elevator.

"Fourth," she said with confidence.

The white-capped maid opened the door. She looked at Mother Margaret as a stranger, and Mother Margaret wanted to say: "Oh, but I know you very well!" Only, when she had seen her before, in the Window Across, she had looked quite small and like anybody; whereas she seemed now a person towering infinitely tall.

"I want," said little Mother Margaret, quite loud and bold, "to see your mistress. At once."

The maid looked at her perplexedly. Small and pretty persons in shabby brown with nice voices and the ways of a lady did not often come knocking at this door demanding to see the mistress, and not by name.

"I don't think—" the maid began doubtfully.

"Tell her that I shall not keep her," said Mother Margaret clearly. "But I must see her. Tell her that I do not know her, but that I am her neighbor, across the court.

Then the maid gave way. There is something about that word "neighbor" that is a talisman. With, "I'll see," the maid ushered her in. She stood weakly in the small and pretty reception-room while the maid went to call her mistress. Then there came a step, and a voice.

Mother Margaret hardly looked at this woman. She saw someone in gray, with a practical face of

concern; then she saw nothing but direct and rather pleasant eyes looking into hers.

"Madam," said Mother Margaret, simply, "you have out on your fire-escape a little Christmas tree. Christmas isn't till day after to-morrow. To-morrow, for a little while, could you lend me that tree?"

"Lend you—" repeated the woman, uncertainly.

"I live just back of you," Mother Margaret went on breathlessly. "I saw the tree. I thought—if you could lend it to me a little while to-morrow—oh, just as it is! and just till you get ready to trim it. I could bring it back quite promptly. Nothing should happen to it. And I could fix it up—just for a little while. My—my little boy never has seen a tree trimmed," she added.

"My dear!" said the woman.

This, Mother Margaret thought, would be the exclamation at the impossibility of doing anything so wild. She looked miserably down at the floor. And so she did not see someone else come into the room, until a soft quick step was close beside her.

"Why," this newcomer said, "Mother! This is a friend of mine!"

Then Mother Margaret looked up, straight into the eyes of the pleasant-faced woman of the library.

"Oh!" cried Mother Margaret. "Oh!" And for a moment said no more. "I never knew I was going to ask this of you—when you've done so much!" she cried at last.

She turned to the older woman in mute apology. And she was actually filled with wonder when she

saw that the eyes of the older woman were shining with tears.

They went into the little living-room and talked it over, how it could be managed. The two women saw—because they looked with the heart—that there must be no thought of the gift of another tree. It must be just as Mother Margaret had suggested. The tree must be lent for a part of to-morrow and returned in time for them to trim it on Christmas Eve.

"For the Dear Child," said Mother Margaret; and then blushed beautifully. "Tony and I call her that," she said.

With that, they called the Dear Child to the room. The white-capped maid was putting her to bed, and brought her in, partly undressed, with surprisingly fat legs and arms and surprisingly thick curls.

"Honey," the older woman said, "a little boy lives across the court. This is his mama."

The Dear Child opened wide eyes.

"I know that little bit o' boy," she announced. "He—he—he—lives in the bed!"

"Yes," Mother Margaret said sorrowfully, "he lives in the bed."

"Say him a kiss," the Dear Child said sleepily, and was carried back to her undressing.

So then it was arranged that when the maid was free, she should come bringing the Christmas tree round to the door of Mother Margaret's flat.

"I could carry it," Mother Margaret insisted.

But no, it must be, it seemed, exactly as they said. Mother Margaret must be there to have left the

outer door ajar, and to amuse the little boy and keep his attention while the tree was put into the other room. She must pin a handkerchief on the open door so that there should be no mistake. And then on no account must she leave the little boy when she heard the tree set in the other room, or else he would hear, and wonder. Would she do all this, exactly as they told her to?

There was no thanking them. Perhaps Mother Margaret's broken words, though, were better thanks than any perfect utterance.

She ran home, through a maze of lights and windows which danced and nodded and all but held out their hands. It is strange and sorrowful, at Christmas time, how much more, if you are going to have Christmas joy, the lights and windows seem to mean Christmas than if you are going to have none.

When she went in she saw that Tony had fallen asleep. His little pillow was still bunched, hard and round, on her own and on the folded quilt. And his face was still turned toward the Window Across.

She sat down to wait. She would not wake him. Until after the maid had been there with the tree, she would not even risk lighting the gas and working at the flowers. She sat almost an hour in the dusk. The outer door of the other room was standing faithfully ajar, with a handkerchief pinned to a panel, and the light there burning low. She could have been sure that she would hear the lightest step in the next room; and then, since Anthony was asleep, she meant to disregard their injunctions and

slip to the door for a word of gratitude for the maid. But when she fancied that she heard a sound, and caught a shadow, and when she had hurried to the door, she stood mute and hardly breathing in her wonderment. No one was there—save indeed a presence. And the presence was the tree, standing neatly erect in its small, green box—and hung from top to base with popcorn and tinsel and ornaments which, even in that dim light, glittered like angels and like stars.

Mother Margaret went in and sat down on her little bed, and looked at the wonder of it. And before she knew that it might possibly happen to her she had hidden her face in her hands and was sobbing.

A stir from Anthony sent her back to his room. He was moving in the little bed "where he lived," and Mother Margaret wiped her eyes and lighted the gas, and wondered how she could keep the happy news.

She went to him to arrange his pillow. He opened his eyes and smiled—as all his life long he had never failed to smile when first he opened his eyes and saw her. Then, at some memory, the eyes flew wide.

"Is to-morrow Christmas, Mama?"

Without just the combination of events which had set her head whirling, Mother Margaret would never have answered as she did.

"Yes, darling. To-morrow is Christmas."

His face lighted. "*Is* it?" he cried. "Is it to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said again, "to-morrow."

"Will the s'prise be when I wake up?"

"Yes," she said, "the surprise will be when you wake up."

He smiled again, and drifted off to sleep. As she smoothed the tumbled covers, the old grip and terror came to her at sight of the little wasted body. The momentary qualm which she had felt died away. Why should he not believe that it was Christmas Day? She knew the heart of a child, knew that the day makes all the difference. Tony should think that he had one Christmas, in any case!

It was past one o'clock when she finished the last of the roses. Tony was sleeping heavily. She turned down the gas and went to work.

The bed, left from the days of her housekeeping, had a high, slender white frame, meant to hold a canopy. From this down to the foot posts ran two cords carrying roses, and roses ran along the foot rail. Working slowly and quietly, she brought the tree from the other room to stand by his side. She had not yet had time to examine the ornaments—she and Tony could do that together. His stocking, the poor little disused stocking, with the big red apple and the orange, she tied to a bough reaching toward the little boy, like a friendly hand. The library books were spread open at pages of bright pictures. The chart of colored birds was pinned to the wall. The sprig of holly was fastened to the coverlet. At the last moment, from scraps of her green tissue, she had fashioned a semblance of holly wreath, with a bit of red paper twisted here and

there for berries. She slipped behind the bed, and hung the wreath in the window. When, in the "little hours," she crept to her own bed, she was without fatigue.

She woke at dawn, and was dressed and back in his room before he had opened his eyes. She lighted the gas, and then she kissed him.

"Merry Christmas, Tony!" she cried.

He struggled up, lovely with sleep. And in upon his dreams came the lines of the roses, and the soft greenness and beauty and brightness of the tree. He sat up, his head thrown back, an expression of almost angelic wonder in his believing face. And he was, with all his joy, a practical little Tony.

"W-w-where'd you get that?" he cried. "Oh, Mama! Mama! Mama!"

And there was something in his cry that opened Mother Margaret's heart like a flower.

A child before its *first* Christmas tree, that is an experience apart. Tony was mute. Tony was shouting. Tony was leaning forward to touch things. Tony was leaning far back to win the effect of the whole. Tony was absolutely and unutterably happy.

So was Mother Margaret—for a while. Then Tony said an unexpected thing.

"Think," he said, "that little Jesus was born to-day. Really, truly to-day."

Mother Margaret looked at him.

"They cannot tell surely, which day, you know, son," she said uncertainly.

"Oh, it was to-day!" Tony told her positively. "I know it was to-day."

Then, when he took in his hands the library picture book, there was the story of Bethlehem of Judea, and she must read it to him, and he listened as if he were hearing it for the first time.

"It was this morning!" he said over dreamily. "The Star in the East was this morning, Mother Margaret. It seems true, now I've seen my tree," he added quaintly.

He seemed possessed with the idea of "to-dayness."

"Think," he said again, "all little boys is got a tree now. Right now. And me, too!"

It was a long, enchanted day; and she waited until the final possible moment to close it.

"Tonykins," she said at last, "now the roses have to come down while Mama puts them into a box and takes them to their own family. And while she's gone, you can lie here and look at the tree, can't you?"

"Yes," said Anthony, "an'—an' it'll talk to me!"

Unquestionably the tree talked to Tony. But the amazing thing was that it also talked to his mother, on her way down to the factory.

No sooner was she on the street from the happy holiday humor of their room than she was faced accusingly by the bustle and clamor of the streets on "the night before Christmas." Everyone was intent on something outside himself. Everyone,

Mother Margaret thought, would have known it was Christmas, if he had not been told.

All save Tony. Her heart smote her when she thought of that. For Tony in the little bed where he "lived," all the blessedness and peace of to-tomorrow had descended to-day, and he had lived them faithfully. And on Christmas morning, on Star of Bethlehem morning for all the rest of the world, it would all be past for him; when for all the rest of the world it would be dawning. . . .

Christmas dinner they ate together on Christmas Eve, there at Tony's bedside, with a royal feast of one thing extra, spread on a little sewing table set in the shadow of the tree.

"Now, dear," said Mother Margaret when they had finished, "the twenty-four hours is almost up, and the fairy is going to come for the tree. You're sure you won't mind—aren't you?"

"Oh, yes, Mother!" Tony's eyes were fastened on the tree as if he feared it might vanish if he looked away.

"And you are going to feel more glad that you had it than sorry to see it go?"

"Oh, yes, Mother!"

Tony's eyes were still on the tree.

"I wish," he said, "I wish Christmas was to-morrow, too. I like to feel like I feel when it's Christmas."

She sat beside him, silent, when outside the door came the tread and tap which they were both expecting. And somewhat to her bewilderment Mother

Margaret admitted four visitors. There was the kindly, practical woman; and the librarian with the pleasant eyes; and the maid with the Dear Child in her arms.

She set the Dear Child down, and the Dear Child ran to Tony's bed, and in her hands was a box.

"Little boy!" she shouted. "See what! See what!"

She laid something beside him. And when, trembling a little with the wonder of it, Tony had unwound this, there lay his longed-for clay and some unbelievable modeling tools. Mother Margaret's eyes flew to the librarian. And the look of the two women met and clung, with something living in the faces of them both. And so it came about that when the maid drew the little tree from the room, Tony hardly knew.

They went away with happy greetings, and wav ing hands, and promises to meet again.

"I—I—I—bring you my kitty and my fimbel! shouted the Dear Child kissing her hand. "That other day," she added importantly.

An hour later Tony opened his eyes sleepily.

"Make a great big racket, Mother Margaret!" he surprisingly demanded.

"Why, dear?" she asked.

" 'Cause if I go to sleep, then it won't be Christmas any more," said Tony, and drifted off with his smile still on his face.

Christmas morning, the true Christmas morning, came with a white mantle and a bright face. Mother Margaret woke to hear the city one tumbling peal

of early bells. She sprang up and threw on her dressing gown, with her pretty hair falling about her shoulders, and ran to Tony's room. He was still asleep. Resolutely, and even joyously, she stooped and kissed him.

"Tony, dear!" she said—but there was something like a sob in her voice. "Wake up! It's Christmas morning!"

His eyes flew open, and stared straight into her eyes.

"It's Christmas morning," she repeated tremulously.

A look of pain came to his face.

"Did I dream my tree?" he asked.

"No!" she cried, "no, dear. You did have your tree. Mother told you yesterday was Christmas because we could just have the tree that day—and she wanted you to have all the fun—*all* of it, Tony—" She broke down, and buried her face in his warm neck.

Something of the solemnity and old wisdom born in a child when a grown person apologizes, or explains, or in any wise treats him as an equal, came growing in Tony's face. But this was over-shadowed now, by a dawning joy.

"Mother!" he cried. "Truly? Truly, is it Christmas *again?*"

"Not again," she said. "But it's Christmas."

He sat up, and threw his arms about her.

"Oh, I'm glad—I'm glad!" he cried. "Why,

Mother. Then *it wasn't just the tree that made us happy, was it?*"

She held him close. And as they sat in each other's arms, in the bare room, with no tree, no roses, and even the clay for a moment forgotten, there came overwhelmingly to the woman, and dimly to the child, the precious understanding that Christmas is a spirit. And the spirit was with them, and made a third presence in their sudden, indefinable joyousness.

Tony drew a little away, and laughed up at her.

"Mother Margaret!" he cried. "It's Christmas—it's Christmas!"

"Yes," she said, "yes, dear. Don't you hear the bells?"

Tony shook his head. "We don't need the bells, Mother," he said. "Why, Mother Margaret!" he cried, "maybe now we can get the feeling every day!"

THE UNWELCOME GIFT[1]

Julia Burket

Snyge, the woodsman, walked briskly through the gates of the park which surrounded the royal palace. On his arm hung a small basket covered with a white cloth. In the basket were some cranberry tarts which his wife was sending to her aunt, an old woman who stirred the royal soup-kettle.

As Snyge walked along the winding road the sun shone and sparkled brightly on the snow; and the roofs of the palace, which glistened through the tree-tops, did not seem nearly so awe-inspiring as they did on other days. On approaching the rear of the palace he heard a great deal of loud hammering, which sounded odd on the quiet of the winter afternoon. He hastened his steps and opened the door of the kitchen.

Along one side of the brick-floored room there stretched a long wooden table. Before the table was a settle, and on this were seated a scullery-maid, two butlers, four maids, and three small footmen; all dressed in the olive livery of the king's household and all busily cracking nuts.

They made such a racket and commotion that

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Snyge was obliged to walk the entire length of the room before he could attract the attention of Mother Jorgan, who was stirring away at the soup with her back to the door.

"What is the meaning of all this noise?" he shouted in the old woman's ear.

At the unexpected sound of his voice she gave a start, and would have dropped the pot-stick if a little boy, who was seated on a high stool behind the kettle, had not caught it.

After Mother Jorgan had recovered from her surprise she told the woodsman that they were cracking nuts for the Christmas feast. They should all have been done the day before, but the scullery-maid had forgotten and the baker was now mixing up the fruit-cake; so they had been forced to set every one to work who was not already busy, in order that the nuts should be ready in time.

While Mother Jorgan was muttering away in her shrill, cackling voice, Snyge had been staring ahead of him at the small boy on the stool. There was really no reason why any one should look at poor little Bebelle. He was by far the ugliest and most insignificant-looking person in the room. Hunched up on his stool in the dark shadows behind the kettle, he looked more like some odious goblin than a little boy. His thick black hair made a fitting frame for his pinched face. His nose was long and crooked; his eyes were very large and very black; and his pathetic little mouth, although tender and childish, made his face seem all the homelier by contrast. In

his hand he held a stick upon which, with infinite labor, he was carving something.

However, Snyge, who said little, but saw a great deal, when Mother Jorgan had finished, pointed his finger at him and said, "Who is that?"

"I am Bebelle," said the child in a thin, but rather sweet, voice.

"And what is that you have there in your hand?"

"That," said the old woman, "is the scepter he is making for the king's Christmas present." And turning her back to the kettle, she looked significantly at Snyge and tapped her forehead. "Tell Snyge about your present, Bebelle, and perhaps he will give you a better stick of wood."

But the child held the stick close and answered fearfully: "Oh, no, thank you, Mother Jorgan! No, thank you! this will do very well for what I want. But I will tell the man what I know of it."

At these words one of the small footmen, who had stopped swinging his hammer for a moment in order to eat a walnut, nudged his neighbor, and they both picked up their bowls of nuts and squatted down on the floor in front of the kettle. And the maid who dusted the royal throne, and was just then going through the kitchen, saw the pages and joined the little group.

"We will now have some fun," one of them whispered to her.

Bebelle, who was unaware of his audience on the other side of the kettle, turning towards Snyge, began his tale.

"You see," he said, "although I am lame and stupid and of no use to any one, the good king allows me to stay here in his kitchen. I sit here all day behind the kettle; and when Mother Jorgan has something else she must do, she allows me to stir the soup. Each day I have a crust of bread and bowl of froth from the top of the soup, and at night the baker allows me to lie behind the great oven. You see, I should be happy, for I have done nothing to deserve this easy lot. But sometimes I am very discontented. I was feeling that way one evening, and, as I was alone in the kitchen, I climbed up there on the table to look out of the casement. It was a lovely night, with all the stars shining, and as I stood there thinking how ashamed I should be to be unhappy when so much splendor was about me, I saw before me a beautiful hand reaching up on the other side of the sill. It clasped a stick of wood and a piece of paper. The hand laid them on the window-ledge, and I heard a voice like music say, 'These are for you, Bebelle.' "

Here there was a great nudging and giggling on the part of his unseen audience, and the little maid called out, "Where is the paper now?"

Bebelle leaned far out over the kettle, and, seeing the maid's duster on the floor, turned again to Snyge and said: "They often come to hear me tell about it. The paper blew into the fire," he explained, and went on: "I was very much frightened and wanted to climb down from the window and leave them there, but at last I found courage to look at the paper. On

it were these words: *Justice, Mercy, Verity, Lowliness, Devotion, Patience, Courage, and, above all, Love.* I stood there a long time, and at last I thought how fine it would be to make a new scepter for a Christmas present to the king, and to carve these words upon it. They are pretty words and have a pleasant sound. I have never heard the wonderful voice again, but I feel that this is what it would have me do."

"Now tell about how the words come," demanded one of the footmen.

But Bebelle would only say, "I am at the end of '*Patience*' now, and, if you do not mind, I will start to carve again. You see, there is very little time left until Christmas."

As Bebelle concluded, his small audience broke up. The maid returned to her dusting, the footmen took their bowls and hammers back to the table, and Mother Jorgan, giving the pot-stick to little Bebelle, went to the door with Snyge.

With the return of the footmen, the noise was even more deafening than before. The fruit-cake was all mixed but the nuts, and the baker stood over the small regiment of workers, every now and then rapping up some lagging one with a cuff on the ears. Mother Jorgan was obliged fairly to shriek the rest of the conversation; or rather her part of it, for Snyge said very little.

"Yes, it is true. Bebelle has been carving at the old stick for weeks. He is very happy. But he is a stupid dolt. The king does not even know that he lives

here in the kitchen. If he did, it would all be at an end with little Bebelle."

"And about the hand?" asked the woodsman.

"That? Oh, well, I don't know. No one here believes it. But I couldn't say. It may be. But I know this much: I have seen the words come. When he was at '*Mercy,*' a few weeks ago, one of the huntsmen brought him a little half-dead squirrel for his supper. But the foolish child warmed it and set it free. When he went back to his carving, 'Mercy' was there on the stick. That has been the way with them all. I know, for I have seen it with my sharp old eyes."

Snyge gave her the basket and went out into the dusk. He had stayed long past his time.

In a little while the noise in the kitchen ceased. The nuts were all finished and put in the waiting cake, and the room was quiet but for the crackling of the fire and the chatter of the servants.

"'*Patience*' is very hard," said little Bebelle to Mother Jorgan. "I get along very well for a while, but just as I have almost finished, the letters seem to fly back again. It is very funny.

"Listen, Mother Jorgan! Some one is coming. It is Shreve of the Fields." His face was lit up until it seemed almost pretty, and his hands trembled at his carving.

In a moment there was a low, mysterious bird-note. Some one drew back the bolts, and youth incarnate stood framed in the dark oaken doorway. Shreve of the Fields swayed there, his slim, vibrant

figure outlined against the sparkling snow without. Pushed back from his thick dark curls he wore a bag-like cap of brilliant red. Over the shoulder of his tattered jacket was flung a brown sack, and in his hands he held a torn net. The lovely poise of his proud young head, the startling beauty of his face, the wonder of his gay, mysterious eyes, were all so intense that one looked again and again, awed, troubled, stupefied, unable to understand such glorious beauty. It was like some vague lovely dream that one had been forced by the very intensity of its sweetness to cast from his thoughts, now recurring to the mind. Even the servants felt it, and they looked again and again at the not unfamiliar sight of the radiant youth. And Shreve, unable, as always, to understand this blind desire to pierce the mystery of his beauty, crossed the room with swift, free steps and approached Bebelle.

"I have brought you this net to mend," he said, and his voice was low and wonderfully sweet. "I use it to catch the poor starving hares; and then I feed them. I will wait if you are not too long."

"Oh, I'll do it gladly," responded the child; "and I'll try to hasten as much as I can."

He put the unfinished scepter in his threadbare little blouse, and bent carefully over the net.

It had now grown dark, and one of the pages went about the room with a taper lighting the candles in the greater pewter sticks. One by one the butlers and footmen came in to eat their evening meal before they should serve the royal dinner. All was

light, and laughter and good-natured raillery in the kitchen.

Shreve walked restlessly up and down the long room. Each time he passed the oven he would snatch a loaf and put it in his sack. "For my birds," he would say with his dazzling smile to the baker. Each time he neared the soup-kettle he stopped and watched little Bebelle's swift-moving fingers. Without looking up, the child would answer his unspoken question, "In a little while, Shreve, I shall have finished it."

As the graceful, glowing figure moved about the room all the youths stared at him and the maidens glanced more shyly from under their long lashes. But Shreve's thoughts were on the world outside and the mending of the net. However, when they spoke to him, he always answered sweetly in his lovely, winning voice.

"How are your friends, O Shreve?" said Mother Jorgan.

"They are well. Only it is cold in the mountains, and the beasts freeze; and the woods and fields are bare, so my birds want food. But wait, old woman; some day I shall know all of nature's secrets, and then winter cannot harm my people."

The servants now came up to the kettle to get their bowls of soup, and Shreve of the Fields stood in the corner and watched them silently.

At last Bebelle crept down from his stool, and slowly moved toward Shreve.

"Here is your net, Shreve," he said.

The beautiful youth took the net and held it before him. He tugged at it, but the mended threads held as firmly as the others.

"This is nicely done, Bebelle. When I come at Christmas I will bring you some fairy moss. How is your scepter?" he asked a little shyly.

"Oh, it is almost finished. I am on *'Patience'* now."

Bebelle pulled the stick from his blouse, and as Shreve of the Fields bent over it, he saw that *"Patience"* was finished.

It was the eve of Christmas, and all the great castle was in a merry bustle and a wild confusion. From the little scullery-maid, who was giving the pots and pans a final scouring, to the queen herself, who was being fitted with a new crown, not a soul in the palace was idle.

The great hall was all green, and red, and white; pine, and holly, and mistletoe. The white pillars were twined with ivy and laurel; from the rafters hung great clusters of mistletoe; and the walls were banked with leaves and red berries. On each side of the royal dais stood a shining, glistening Christmas-tree; and the galleries were hung low with Christmas greens.

It was not long until the king and queen ascended their royal thrones, the queen happy because the new crown was very becoming, and the king that there was a grand feast in prospect.

The royal court assembled with laughter and gay

words and smiling faces; and of them all the princess Faunia was the most admired. Tall and slim and beautiful, as the princess should be, with the dainty grace of a young fawn and the proud young way of one, she stood by the dais with a dark, handsome prince. Each time he spoke to her, although his words were laughing, she knew that he loved her; and each time he looked at her, his gay eyes said what his lips dared not speak. The princess, like every one else in the room, was very, very happy.

In the kitchen below sat Bebelle, carving the last word upon his gift for the king. His face was very pale; it looked even thinner than usual. His great black eyes burned feverishly, and his hands worked swiftly upon the word *"Love."*

"I must not be late! I must not be late!" he said over and over again.

Most of the servants had left the kitchen and were sitting in the gallery of the hall above, watching the royal pageant.

However, there was a little girl left in the room, who had to remain behind in order to keep the fire going in the great fireplace.

"When will you give the king his gift?" she asked Bebelle.

"When all the others have given theirs and Shreve of the Fields alone is left he will give the king his beautiful raven, and then he will say, 'There is still another, O King, who has a gift for you.' Mother Jorgan has promised to let me go with her up the stairs, and when Shreve says this, then I will

walk into the room and give the king his scepter."

"Shreve of the Fields may forget," said the little girl, shrewdly; "he thinks only of his birds and beasts, of others he has no thought. Old Jason, the butler, says he has no soul."

"Oh, yes, he has!" said Bebelle. "He is wild and timid like his animals, though, and is afraid to show it. He has told me how some nights he lies in his cave with his animals and longs for a human friend. But you know, Sana, he is so beautiful and so different from every one else that no one can be friends with him. But look what he gave me! It is fairy moss, and Shreve says that if I carry it, I shall be brave enough to walk through the great hall to the king and not be ashamed of my ugly face.

Bebelle held up a little patch of silvery moss, the drops of dew sparkling like diamonds upon it.

"Oh!" said the child, in awed wonder. "It is so beautiful! And do you think it really has such power?"

"Why, yes, of course; Shreve told me so."

"Ah!" sighed little Sana, "if I only had a tiny bit, I would not be so afraid of the butler when he scolds me."

Bebelle carefully tore the moss in half and gave Sana part of it.

"I must go back to my carving now," he said, as the child tried to thank him.

"And I to my fire. Oh, Bebelle! Look! Look!" cried Sana. "The fire has gone out while I have been talking to you!"

"I will make you another."

When Mother Jorgan came in, the fire was again burning brightly.

"Are you ready, Bebelle?" she asked, her voice trembling with excitement. "Shreve is giving the king his raven."

"No, dear Mother Jorgan, I have mended the fire for Sana instead."

"You foolish boy!" and she tore the stick from his hand. "Why, of course it is done! Is '*Love*' not there as plainly as the other words? Come, we must make haste or we shall be too late."

As the two reached the door of the hall Shreve of the Fields was standing before the royal dais, his proud lovely head thrown back and one graceful arm stretched forth toward the king. On the tip of his finger there perched a beautiful raven, all glossy black streaked with purple, and as quiet as if it were still in the forest. As these two of the woods stood there in their perfect, unaffected beauty everything else about the gay court seemed curiously dwarfed and cheapened.

"O King," he said, in his sweet, thrilling voice, "here is a gift for you!"

As the raven flew from his hand to the king the courtiers crowded around the radiant youth; and Mother Jorgan, in the doorway outside, whispered to Bebelle: "Child, he has said nothing of you. If you still wish to do this dreadful thing, you must enter unannounced."

And so, with his scepter held closely in one arm,

the child bravely walked into the gay throng. As he neared the throne the courtiers drew back on either side; and standing before the royal dais, Bebelle said simply, "My King, I have made you a new scepter for a Christmas gift."

All about the throne lay precious and costly gifts; gold and tapestries, silver and precious stones. On the arm of the king's chair perched the beautiful raven, and in the queen's hand was a necklace of diamonds, and rare aquamarines. Before them stood a child, strange and grotesque, holding in his hand a rough piece of fire-wood.

"I have made you a new scepter," he had said.

"Child," said the king, and his voice was not unkind, "this is not the time for you to appear before us." And he motioned a page to lead Bebelle from the room.

There was a painful silence as the child crept slowly from the bright hall, one hand still clasping the rejected gift. The queen signed for the fiddlers to begin their playing. The princess Faunia, who was standing with the noble prince under the balcony, remarked that such things were enough to spoil one's Christmas. The prince comforted her, and said if he had his will, nothing should ever happen to mar a single moment of her entire life. The princess was even happier than before. The queen told the king, who looked a little worried, that such things naturally happen in such great households, and that, with the serving of the royal banquet, things would be restored to their former gaiety.

This last suggestion comforted the king mightily; and, indeed, before the page had even announced the banquet everything was as gay and merry as it had been an hour before.

In the bright warm kitchen there was dance and song, and every one there was happy, too.

That is, all but little Bebelle. He lay beside the oven, still holding tightly to the scepter, saying nothing.

Mother Jorgan brought him a bowl of hot soup. He thanked her pitifully, but would not touch it. Now and then one of the servants would come to him and shyly, but kindly, ask him to come and have some of the wassail. Shreve came down from the feast above. The baker gave him thirteen loaves for his birds, and he stopped to speak to Bebelle.

"I am sorry, Bebelle," he said, in his timid, winning way. "But I had no chance to speak of you. It was a shame that the king refused your gift. But come, do not be sad. Every one is sorry, and things will not be made better by lying there."

But Bebelle did not answer. The tears sprang to Shreve's beautiful, mysterious eyes.

"Would you like to come and sleep in my cave to-night?"

Bebelle gave a little gasp.

"Oh, Shreve," he said, "that is the greatest thing in the world that could happen to me! But somehow I feel as if that could not be—to-night."

So Shreve of the Fields went a little sadly out into the starry night.

It grew later. Slowly and reluctantly the servants left the warm, friendly kitchen. Many stopped to speak kindly to the silent child, who lay huddled in his corner.

At last, though, they had all left but a little page, who put out the candles and skipped fearfully from the room. All was silent and dark.

The child lay there a long time.

Slowly and sweetly, through the still night a voice softly floated.

"Bebelle, little Bebelle!" it said; "come to the door."

The child trembled, but did not get up.

Once again came the low, mellow voice: "Bebelle, I am waiting for you. Come, open the door."

As if in a dream he crept across the floor. Slowly he slid back the great bolts and lifted the door latch.

There in the snowy dooryard was a glorious vision. A figure that glowed and glistened against the snow like the fire and light of a thousand diamonds. Over the head was a veil like lacy frost. From the scintillating robes stretched a beautiful white hand.

"Come with me," said the voice, "and I will make you a great ruler."

Bebelle shrank back against the heavy door.

"Oh, no!" he cried, "I am not fit to be a ruler. I am ugly and poor, and of no use to any one in the world."

The vision reached out and took the scepter which Bebelle still clasped to his breast.

As the firm white hand grasped it the rough wood

turned to shining gold and the letters carved upon it were set with pearls, and rubies, and sapphires, and other precious stones.

"These words that you have carved upon the scepter," said the high, thrilling voice, "*Justice, Mercy, Verity, Lowliness, Devotion, Patience, Courage, and, above all, Love*—these are the attributes of a king. Only he who carves his own scepter, with these words upon it, only he is fit to wield it. Again I summon you to come with me and I will make you ruler of a great kingdom."

And into the white night the child followed the steps of the vision.

THE STRANGE STORY OF MR. DOG AND MR. BEAR [1]

Mabel Fuller Blodgett

(For very little folk)

The Christmas Tree

Mr. Bear was looking forward to the first real snowstorm because Mr. Dog had made a fine double-runner, and they were both planning for little housework, and a lot of coasting. Mr. Bear's fur suit was just the thing for winter sports, but Mr. Dog had been obliged to go to the village and buy himself a sweater. It was bright crimson and was very becoming. Mr. Dog, who loved fine clothes, had also purchased a scarlet and white skating cap, with a tassel that hung down over one ear in a most engaging manner. So both Mr. Dog and Mr. Bear could hardly wait for cold weather to set in, and they spent a great deal of time running out to the porch and looking at the thermometer that hung there. When they were not doing that, they were reading the weather reports in the newspapers, or watching

[1] Reprinted by permission of the author and "St. Nicholas Magazine."

the clouds, and at last they were rewarded late one afternoon by the sight of large feathery flakes of snow lazily floating downward from a cold gray sky. But alas! there was to be no coasting for either of them, for many days to come.

Mr. Bear, who had not been feeling like himself for some time, came down with the mumps the very next morning, and Mr. Dog had his paws full with cooking, and nursing, and bedmaking, and carrying up trays to the invalid.

Now I suppose you never saw a bear with the mumps! It is a sorry sight, I assure you, and the cottage was a sad place now with only the doctor's visits for company and Mr. Bear in the dreadfulest state with his poor neck so swollen that none of his collars would fit him—he had lately, to please Mr. Dog, taken to wearing them. For daily use a red bandana handkerchief became the only thing possible. Well, Mr. Dog was a pretty fair nurse, though he did bring Mr. Bear some lemonade the first day, and, if you've ever had mumps, you will know how Mr. Bear felt after he got a real good taste. But Mr. Dog was more careful after that and never so much as said "pickles" or brought Mr. Bear anything that was sour or puckery, so they got along quite nicely.

Still, there was a lot of time for thinking, and Mr. Bear, looking wistfully out on the snowy landscape, began to plan for Christmas. He decided that he would surprise Mr. Dog, and the surprise would take the form of a Christmas tree. There were plenty

of dear little firs growing about near by, each one holding up its tiny branches as if begging for the honor of being chosen, and Mr. Bear knew Mr. Dog, who was something of a carpenter, was just dying to have a complete tool-chest, and he thought what a fine present that would be and how beautifully the awl and saws and other tools would glitter, hung from the branches in the light of the Christmas candles.

Mr. Bear would also see that Mr. Dog had a wonderful big bone, the best in the market, and tied with scarlet ribbon and holly, and a bottle of perfumery, and oh, yes! a dozen handkerchiefs with colored borders. Mr. Bear had to get his notebook down and write the things as fast as he remembered them, and the best of it was Mr. Bear was determined, firmly determined, that Mr. Dog should know nothing whatever about the whole matter.

Now the funny part of it was that Mr. Dog had been thinking also, and the end of his reflections were pretty much what Mr. Bear's had been. He would give Mr. Bear a Christmas tree and *Mr. Bear should know nothing whatever about it.*

Mr. Dog was so excited that one day he put salt instead of sugar into the pudding and never knew the difference till he and Mr. Bear sat down to dessert together. By this time Mr. Bear was better, and soon he was well enough to go coasting, which means that he was well enough to do anything at all that he wanted to.

His actions began to puzzle Mr. Dog. In the first

place, Mr. Bear began to make a lot of mysterious trips to the village, and then he was always getting a lot of catalogues, which he was careful to keep locked up. One day Mr. Dog found him measuring the height of the parlor ceiling, and he looked very much embarrassed when asked what he was doing; and yet Mr. Dog hadn't the slightest idea of what was going on. You see, he was so full of his own plans to surprise Mr. Bear that it never crossed his mind that Mr. Bear might have secret holiday plans of his own. Mr. Dog was chiefly concerned that Mr. Bear shouldn't find out what *he* was doing, and, as he was much more careful than poor, dear, blundering Mr. Bear, he never gave his friend the slightest idea of what was in his mind.

After a lot of thinking, Mr. Dog decided to cut the prettiest little Christmas tree you ever saw, that he had found near by in the forest. He would trim it with popcorn and cranberries and little candles, and he would give Mr. Bear a half dozen jars of the finest honey, because Mr. Bear loved honey best of anything, and a big blueberry pie tied up with scarlet ribbon and holly, for Mr. Bear liked blueberry pie next best, and a muffler, a beautiful warm plaid muffler, because Mr. Bear wasn't stylish but loved to be comfortable. Oh, yes, and a white and gold book for the parlor table. Mr. Dog didn't care at all what was inside the book, but he wanted a very handsome cover. It would look awfully well under the best lamp, and as the only book in the house was a cook-book, Mr. Dog felt it would lend quite an air

to the whole cottage, and was, in a way, really needed. To do all this would take every penny Mr Dog had earned, but Mr. Dog did not grudge a single cent of his hoard.

Mr. Bear didn't tell anybody of his plan, and Mr Dog didn't tell anybody either. They both gave very good reasons for refusing a number of invitations that they received for Christmas parties; Mr Bear, looking very wise, said he felt rather old for romping about, just a quiet evening in slippers at home for him; and Mr. Dog said what with the mumps and all he was so behindhand with his work that he thought he would rather spend a quiet day at home, with slippers and a comfortable chair before the fire in the evening.

But what were they going to do about Christmas, their friends asked.

Mr. Bear looked up in the air and rubbed his head and finally said something about wreaths in the windows, and Mr. Dog answered briskly that he was going to make the finest plum pudding that day for dinner they ever saw and if that wasn't celebrating Christmas, what was?

Still, it did seem as if the time would never arrive, for you know yourself how slow Christmas and birthdays and vacations are about getting around; and how very quickly school-days and trips to the dentist, and such things come. But at last it really was December twenty-fourth, and that very evening after sunset had been planned both by Mr. Dog and Mr. Bear for their grand surprise.

Mr. Dog had all his presents on the top shelf of his bedroom closet, and Mr. Bear had all his presents on the top shelf of *his* bedroom closet: and both of them had their closets locked and the keys in their pockets.

Neither of the friends talked much at supper that night for both were too busy thinking. Mr. Bear wanted to get some good excuse for leaving Mr. Dog and getting into the forest where the Christmas tree was to be found. It was already cut, but it wanted trimming, and Mr. Bear decided to trim it right where it stood, or rather where it leaned against another fir-tree, and then manage some way to get it into the house without Mr. Dog's knowing it. Mr. Bear's pockets were full of tinsel and bells, gilt walnuts, golden and silver balls, and such like ornaments. He fairly tinkled when he walked; but Mr. Dog was so very busy thinking that he didn't notice.

At last supper was over and the dishes neatly washed and put away. The two friends turned to each other, and both spoke at once and said just the same thing all in a breath without pausing:

"I was thinking of taking a little stroll this evening."

"Why, that's a good idea," said Mr. Bear, putting on his cap and goloshes as he spoke. It was handy for him not having to bother with anything more on account of his fine fur coat, though he would rather have liked a muffler.

"I think so, too," said Mr. Dog, hurriedly getting

into his coasting togs—sweater, tasseled cap, and all.

"Which way were you going, Mr. Bear? I was thinking of going west—"

"I was thinking of going east," said Mr. Bear, much relieved at the turn things were taking. And so the two friends parted.

Mr. Bear called out over his shoulder, "No use, Mr. Dog, of being back before eight o'clock a fine night like this."

"Oh, no!" said Mr. Dog, much pleased and inwardly planning to get his tree trimmed in the forest, and then to have it all set up in the cottage a few moments before that hour.

So both friends hurried off—Mr. Dog to the west, to hang on his tree as fast as ever he could the strings of cranberries and pop-corn with which his pockets were bulging, and Mr. Bear to decorate his tree in the most beautiful manner and as rapidly as possible. And my! weren't they busy? You may not believe it, but each of them got through the very same moment, which was exactly seventeen and a half minutes to eight o'clock, and each of them was exactly one half mile from home. Mr. Bear put his tree on his shoulder and started; Mr. Dog put *his* tree on *his* shoulder and started. Mr. Bear's tree was bigger and heavier than Mr. Dog's tree, but then Mr. Bear was stronger than Mr. Dog, so they both covered the ground at the same rate of speed.

Now I suppose you have already guessed what happened. It was sure to, wasn't it? And it just did.

Mr. Dog, stealthily coming up the back way, and Mr. Bear, stealthily coming up the front way, met right at the cottage door, and I wish you had been there to see them. I don't suppose their eyes were ever wider opened in all their lives; and as for their mouths, they were open too, and both their tongues were hanging out.

Mr. Dog was the quickest, so he began to laugh first, but Mr. Bear was not long in following, and they both laughed so hard they had to lean their beautiful Christmas trees up against the side of the cottage while they rolled over and over in the snow and neither one could stop.

But at last Mr. Bear caught his breath and sat up, and Mr. Dog, still wiping away tears of merriment with his paw, sat up too, and then it all came out—their wonderful plans and all the doings.

Well, the end of it was, there were two Christmas trees set up in Mr. Bear's house that night and two very happy people.

The presents were a truly surprise after all, and they were exactly right. Each said so to the other, I don't know how many times. Mr. Bear put on his muffler at once, though the cottage was as hot as hot could be, and Mr. Dog had so much perfumery on his handkerchief that they had to open the front door to air off. Mr. Dog began to do things with his tools at once, while gnawing ever and anon at his wonderful bone, and Mr. Bear ate a piece of blueberry pie that was big enough to give him seven kinds of nightmare, but didn't.

Then Mr. Bear drew up his big rocking-chair to the fire, while Mr. Dog threw himself down on the rug in front of it and stretched out to enjoy the blaze with his paws clasped under his head. And they both said there had never been such a Christmas and that it was the greatest fun having it that way, all alone. I suppose they meant not having the forest and the farm people there; and perhaps this is a good place and time for you and me to leave them, too.

A BURNT FORK SANTA CLAUS[1]

Elinore Pruitt Stewart

Mrs. Culberson stood in her cabin door, and looked out upon the sparkling beauty of a sunny winter morning. Beyond the valley rose the shining, snow-covered mountains. A mile below lay the white surface of Henry's Fork, tree-bordered and ice-bound. She could see the exact spot in the stream where she and the children had caught the barrel of suckers that had been their chief food since the snow came.

When Henry Clay, her oldest child and only son, had come from the creek one day and told her that there were a great many fish at the bend, and that they were lying on the bottom almost too lazy to move, she had said, "We'll go and catch a lot; we will salt them down in our water keg; they'll come in handy." That had been almost four months before.

"Pa" Culberson was one of those Micawber-like persons who are always expecting something to turn up. In more prosperous days, when the Culbersons had lived farther east, they had owned a good team

[1] This story was first printed in "Youth's Companion," December 10, 1914. Reprinted by special permission. All rights reserved by the author.

of horses and a cow; but Pa's waiting propensities had encouraged the man with the mortgage to "turn up," and the family had been left without their horses and their cow.

Mrs. Culberson had urged her husband to sell their little plot of land and to use the proceeds to begin anew in another place. Pa had a "swapping" streak in him, and so it was not long before they had traded their land for a rickety wagon and a pair of small beasts that Mrs. Culberson called "donkeys." Then, with all they owned piled into the wagon, they set forth to make a fresh start in the world. Pa sat on the top of the load to drive the donkeys, and Mrs. Culberson and the children walked alongside.

One night they had camped by a stream in a fertile little valley. Mrs. Culberson liked the water and the view, and refused to go on. Weeks of wandering had worn out the children's shoes, and winter would soon be upon them; so they unloaded their scanty belongings and set about building their cabin. It stood close to a hillside for shelter from the fierce winds, and it had no floor except the earth. A place had been left for a window in one end, but there was no glass in it. A piece of cheesecloth tacked over the opening let in light and a wooden shutter kept out the storm. The roof was made of poles laid carefully side by side and well covered with earth.

While Mrs. Culberson and the children were chinking and daubing the cracks in their cabin, Pa began to build the stable for the donkeys. The golden

September days were slipping away, and the food supply was getting low; as soon as he had finished the tiny stable, Pa went off to get work with the sheepmen. The family were left alone in their new house; it might be months before they saw him again; in fact, it might be as long as that before they saw anyone except "Grandma" Clark, who lived in a cabin near the stream.

Every day little Mrs. Culberson worked with all her might; and in order that the children should not get lonely or afraid in the wilderness, she tried to keep them busy. First she set them hauling wood from the cedars near by; Pa had made a door for the cabin from the wagon box, but they could load the wood and poles on the running gear of their wagon. They could manage the donkeys easily, and they soon gathered a huge woodpile. Then the children dug a cellar in the side of the hill. Henry Clay and Lizzie Isabel, who were the oldest, did the digging. Jennie Lou and Jessie May helped by carrying out the dirt as fast as it was loosened. Mrs. Culberson and five-year-old baby C'listie did the encouraging. Each was proud of sharing in the work.

A few days after the cellar was finished, the children went on an exploring expedition to discover whether they had any neighbors. The first rancher they found laughed when he saw the eager, freckled children on their little donkeys. He was harvesting his vegetables, and he offered them all a chance to work for him. After that, the children and their mother were busy for almost a month, picking up po-

tatoes and helping store winter vegetables for the ranchers who lived up and down the valley. In that way they had stocked their own cellar, and had become the proud owners of a few bags of grain, which they put by for their faithful donkeys.

As Mrs. Culberson stood in the door that winter morning, looking out over the snow-covered country, she was mentally giving thanks that she and the children had a warm cabin to shelter them. On a tall, dead pine she saw a great eagle sitting in the sun. A coyote dug a rabbit out of the snow, and trotted away with it. Far below on the creek, she could see the smoke curling upward from her nearest neighbor's chimney.

"Poor old soul!" she said to herself. "There all alone while her grandson, Charley, is away herding sheep. It must be plumb bad to have only one child, and to be a widow, and old, too. Here it is just two days before Christmas. I believe I'll go down and bring her up here for a spell."

Her care-seamed face was thoughtful. "It's more'n three months since Pa left, and not a word from him. I *do* hope he hasn't—"

But she was too loyal to put what she feared into words, even to herself. Closing the door, she put the breakfast of salt fish and potatoes on the table.

"Ma, can't we have a little *tiny* piece of bacon for breakfast?" asked Jennie Lou.

"It's very near Christmas," said Jessie May.

"I just hate suckers!" said Lizzie Isabel.

"Now you young uns eat what is put before you,

and don't be so choicey," said Mrs. Culberson. "I declare, I'll have to boil you up some sage tea to make your fish and potatoes taste good to you again. Then after we're through, I have a *big* secret to tell you."

The wagon box had furnished enough lumber to make not only the door, but a bench, and a high shelf across one end of the cabin. When the children had finished breakfast, their mother put a box upon the bench. Mounting the box, she took from the shelf several small packages.

"Now, children," she said, as she unrolled a square package, "here is all the meat we have—just enough for seven slices. We are going to have it for dinner Christmas Day, and *who* do you guess is going to eat the extra slice? *That* is my big secret."

"I could eat *all* of it now," said Henry Clay. The children eyed the piece of bacon hungrily.

"Children, what on earth has come over you to make you so gluttonous? I am ashamed of you. Now, if you can behave yourselves, I will tell you something."

They watched her with fascinated eyes as she measured two cupfuls of sugar into a small pail. Next she took four tablespoonfuls of rice, carefully tied the little heap of white grains in a cloth, and dropped it into the pail with the sugar. Putting the lid on the pail, she again mounted the box, and put the pail beside a small jar that contained a handful of coffee.

"There," she said, with pride in her voice, "that is my sick corner. If any of you get sick, I have *some* little things for you."

"I'm sick, I'm awfully sick," said C'listie.

"C'listie Culberson, no one would ever dream you were named for your own grandmother, C'listie Yancy. Your Grandma Yancy would *never* act that way."

The children watched her intently and silently as she measured the remaining sugar.

"There is enough for a cake, and we can have a carrot pie," she said, "and perhaps some sugar syrup for breakfast, and there will be a little left in the bowl. Don't one of you young uns dare to touch that bowl; the sugar in the bowl is for manners; now mind that. We'll have a nice dish of rice, and enough grease will fry out of the bacon to season the potatoes and to make the pie crust, and we can have biscuit, too," she ended triumphantly.

The children, catching her jubilant spirit, began to clap their hands and dance.

"Now, Lizzie Isabel, we will clean up the house and get everything ready. You girls can wear your gingham dresses, and Henry Clay can—well, he can wear his pa's light shirt, and his trousers, too; they will be too long, of course, but he can roll them up, and we can girt them in at the waist. We'll all dress up and go after Grandma Clark. She's all alone. We couldn't be so selfish as to sit down and eat all our good things alone."

So they all worked with a will; but there was not much to do.

"You children don't know how lucky you are to be poor," said Mrs. Culberson. "If we'd been rich enough to have a floor, we would have to scrub; and if we had a glass window, we'd have that to wash. But as it is, we can get this room in order in a jiffy."

Through all her ups and downs, Mrs. Culberson had kept her "settin' out"; she had her feather bed, the ten beautiful patchwork quilts given her by different members of her family; the Yancy sheets and the lovely Culberson tablecloth, all homespun and woven.

It was a proud little group that later in the day left the freshly decked cabin and started for Grandma Clark's. All the girls' dresses were a year too small, their sleeves were too short and their waists too tight; but the children had pressed their worn ribbons, and their hair was neatly braided, and they were all so happy that only an unfeeling critic could have seen anything except beauty and sweetness about them. Henry Clay's trousers were many sizes too large, but they were rolled up at the bottom and well "girt in" at the waist. His shirt was caught up and tacked and pinned in so many places that it had almost lost all resemblance to a shirt; but if his fourteen year old body *was* too small to fill his father's clothes, his pride overflowed, and made him seem large and important in his own eyes.

They had laid poles upon the running gear of the wagon and wired them firmly, in order to have a safe place for Grandma Clark to ride. Mrs. Culberson took a last satisfied look round the neat room, warned the children once more to mind their manners, and not to let the company see that they did not have bread every meal, and to remember how fortunate they were to have a good warm cabin, plenty of wood, and friends to share their comforts, "and them friends rale close neighbors, not more'n six miles away."

So they clambered on their odd carryall and drove off, with the donkeys belly-deep in the soft snow.

Miles away, up in the mountains near Burnt Fork, lay the ranch of Jack Nevin. He was an "old-timer" without kith or kin, but he never lived alone, for he was always taking some one in to share his home. At that time he had living with him old John Enderby, who had a special fondness for making fun of others. Once a year Jack Nevin made a trip to Green River for supplies, but, oddly enough, he would never permit anyone to go with him.

No one who came to the ranch suspected that Jack's heart was starved for home ties, and that he longed for some one to love and to work for. For years he had had an imaginary family. He took almost as much pleasure in the growth and development of his imaginary children as he would have taken had they been real. Of course he could not tell

his friends about his pretense; but when he went to town he spoke to strangers of his "folks," and talked about them just as if he had actually had a family.

This was the first time he had ever been in Green River when the holidays were so near. The windows of the stores were filled with toys and candies. As he drove up the street his heart was sad; there were so many things that he would have liked to buy if he had only had some one to give them to.

When he drove into the livery barn, the proprietor, to whom he had talked on his other visits, called out, "Hello, Nevin! How are you? How are the little girls and their ma? In town to interview Santa Claus, I suppose?"

Jack walked up the street, looking at the pretty things, and almost hating other men who had "folks" to buy for. Suddenly he remembered what Hall, the liveryman, had said. After all, why should he not do it? Whose business was it, anyway, if he chose to buy dolls, toys, and trinkets? As he thought over the idea his recklessness grew. The boys might laugh and joke, he realized, but the chance that they would find out seemed small.

That night he confided in his landlady; and his enthusiasm for his family was so contagious that she forgot the high price of meat.

"I suppose your little girls sent you loaded with a list?" she said.

Jack searched his pockets, but failed to find any list.

"Well, now, that's too bad," he said, with such evident concern that the landlady was entirely deceived.

"Now don't you worry," she said. "My Emma works at Little Pete's. You can get more for your money in there than you can at any other store in town. And Emma will help you make a good selection."

The next morning the whim was still upon Jack Nevin. He went to Little Pete's, and passed there the happiest three hours of his life, choosing and buying the things that he would have liked to put into little stockings.

"I believe I'll take that sweater for ma," he said awkwardly. After a while his fancy became more practical, and he bought warm hoods, pieces of flannel, gingham, and calico.

At last all the bundles were wrapped and loaded on the wagon with the provisions that he had purchased for the winter. Jack was standing in a store entrance, trying to remember whether he had forgotten anything, when up the street rode half a dozen Burnt Fork boys, with their "chaps" flapping and their spurs jangling merrily. They shouted a greeting when they caught sight of Jack. Jack watched them canter up the street with foreboding in his heart.

It was already late in the afternoon, but he decided to start on the return trip to his ranch immediately for he did not enjoy the thought that the

"boys" might discover how he had been spending his time in Green River.

Sunset of the following day saw him nearing home, but trouble had sat with him all the way. He could imagine what "fun" there would be at the ranch if those boys found out his poor secret. What could he do with all the things he had bought for his imaginary family? If he took them home, there was John Enderly to be reckoned with.

Finally a solution occurred to him—he would throw them into Henry's Fork. He knew where he could find an air hole. By driving across the ice below the regular crossing, he hoped to avoid discovery, and so, leaving the road, he turned down the long cañon that led out on the plateau on which the Culberson cabin stood. When he came in sight of the little log building he gave a whistle of surprise, for he had not known that anyone lived there. As he approached the cabin he hallooed, and getting no answer, was about to drive on, when he noticed that smoke was coming from the stove-pipe.

He decided to go in and warm his feet; but when he entered the cabin, he found himself more interested in the evidences of poverty than in the stove. A box nailed to the wall served as a cupboard. He lifted the flour-sack curtain before it, and peeped within; he saw the bacon sliced for the Christmas dinner; he saw all the scanty preparations.

"Huh!" he grunted. "Cake with no eggs! I've made it; I know what it's like!"

Dropping the curtain, he glanced about the room. "No chairs," he commented. "Must be mighty poor. Kids in the bunch, too." Then he noticed a cap hanging on a peg. "Boy among 'em. By heck, I guess I'm in time to beat Santy Claus, but I didn't buy anything for a boy."

For an hour Jack worked busily and happily. All that he had bought for his "family" he carried into the cabin; then, opening cases of his own supplies, he carried in canned goods, dried fruit, a ham, some sugar, coffee, and a package of tea. When he had finished, he gazed about the little room and smiled. "Mighty near filled the cabin," he said. "Reckon some flour won't be amiss, and I've a good notion to fill that new lamp and leave it on the table, lighted. They're coming back soon, or they wouldn't have left fire. There's the coat and the lamp for the woman; candy, nuts and dolls for the kids; provisions for 'em all, but not a thing for that boy. I just can't do him that way. He can have my new gun."

Jack went out to the wagon and brought in the shotgun, and hanging the cap on the muzzle, leaned it against the wall. Then he put his boxes of ammunition on the floor beside it. Finally, he filled the stove full of wood, and closing it carefully, left the cabin.

The dusk was deepening when he mounted his wagon. Beyond Henry's Fork, he met the Culbersons returning with their guest; he eyed them

sharply as they passed. After he had crossed the bottoms and was out on the snow-covered flat, he laughed happily.

"It beat throwing them into the creek," he said, "and the boy is just right for the gun!"

As soon as the family and their guest crossed the creek and reached the plateau they saw the light of the bright new lamp.

"Oh, Pa's come, our Pa's come home for Christmas!" shouted Henry Clay, joyously.

"Don't be so excited, Henry Clay. You tend to driving them dunkeys, or you will have Mis' Clark dumped off in the snow. That'd be a fine way to treat a neighbor, wouldn't it? You children quit twisting round. If any of you fall off, you'll have to walk to the house."

Thus admonished, the children sat as still as they could. Henry Clay tried to get the donkeys to hurry, but donkeys have ways of their own. At last they drew up before the door of the cabin. The children would have rushed into the cabin, but their mother restrained them.

"My goodness, children, where are your manners? Pa's made a fire; don't you see the smoke? You just behave yourselves."

Once inside, the little group stood amazed. The new lamp burned brightly; boxes, bundles and packages were scattered everywhere about the place. Grandma Clark, stiff with the cold, went at once to

the stove. The fire burned merrily. She held her hands to the grateful warmth, and said, "Your man's a right good provider, Mis' Culberson."

"But where's Pa?" asked C'listie.

A thorough search revealed no Pa. On a new calendar, which lay on the table, were scribbled these words: "The gun is for the boy. The rest is for all of you. Yours truly, Santy Claus."

An hour later supper was over; even hungry little C'listie could hold no more ham, and sat nodding and hugging a wonderful doll. Henry Clay and Lizzie Isabel had put the donkeys into the stable, and given them an extra allowance of grain and carrots. With shining eyes and heart too happy for words, Henry Clay sat examining his treasure, the bright, new gun. The girls were rapturously sorting their new ribbons, hoods, and books. Mrs. Culberson, busy storing yet unopened packages beneath the bed, said to the girls:

"I *did* 'low for you girls to sleep under the blazin'-star quilt, being it's Christmas time, but I ain't going to let you. It ain't never been used, and I'm going to keep that quilt for Santa Claus. I'll see him some time."